THE Hudson REVIEW

N GARDNER:
Fiction

O ANTONIO CUADRA:
of Cifar and the Sweet Sea

GENE K. GARBER:
Host—a story

EPH EPSTEIN:
tion Necessary?

IN BALABAN:
Good

s by JAMES BAKER HALL, BREWSTER GHISELIN,
HOLSCHER, JOSEPH BRUCHAC, BARRY SPACKS.

ce Chronicle by MARCIA B. SIEGEL.

ws by MARVIN MUDRICK, VERNON YOUNG,
EN FARBER, CHARLES W. MILLARD.

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THE
Hudson Review

VOLUME XXIX
NUMBER 4
WINTER 1976-77

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To Our Readers

After five years on our masthead, Roger Sale has recently sent us his resignation as an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW, in order to have more time to devote to his own writing. Although we shall miss his helpful collaboration in reading and evaluating manuscripts, we are happy that he plans to continue his association with us as a regular contributor.

THE HUDSON REVIEW acknowledges with appreciation a subvention from the Center for Inter-American Relations for the translation of the poems in this issue by Pablo Antonio Cuadra.

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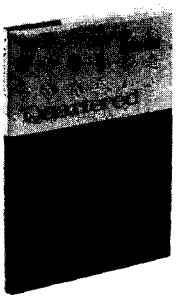

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Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

I think you irresponsible to have published Marvin Mudrick's ugly, hectoring two pages on F. R. Leavis' new book, *The Living Principle* (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Spring 1976).

It was unfair of Mudrick to fasten on what Leavis says by the way about America, which hardly affects his main arguments.

Mudrick displayed Leavis' special terms and phrases out of context to make them look awkward or meaningless. So he might have done Coleridge's, Carlyle's, Arnold's, or the terms of other great creative intellectuals. Leavis is careful to define—

> 'Nisus' is irreplaceable. In explaining its necessity one has to invoke something like Blake's distinction ['identity' as against 'selfhood']. 'Effort' doesn't suffice; it implies conscious, explicitly realized, and deliberate purpose, and those tend to imply what Lawrence points to diagnostically with the triad, 'ego, will and idea'. The need for a word that eliminates this last suggestion is implicit in Blake's 'I know that they [his works] are not mine'.

I can only complain that definition matters.

Mudrick quoted a resuming, self-conscious bit of Leavis, with many special terms, to make the 'literary style' look 'desperate and unspeakable'. What the bit of Leavis looked was obsessive and unnaturally abstract, as would certain passages of Samuel Johnson, Carlyle, Ruskin, Henry James, thus out of context. The passages are not their respective writers' usual, as Mudrick implied of Leavis', but neither are the passages lapses. The frontiers of language, and thought, are dared; it works because of the preparation made for it.

So Leavis in his eighties has become difficult. Wittgenstein being his point of departure, he is in *The Living Principle* 'opportunistic', indirect, poetic, to describe and to advocate ' "English" as a discipline of thought'. Leavis now will compel only the good readers among us.

Mudrick showed himself at last quite the poor reader to take the point of Leavis' long commentary on *Four Quartets* to be that the poem is 'gloomy' while the poet is yet somehow 'major'. Leavis' point is that Eliot in *Four Quartets* registers the modern problems of the spirit in their real complexity and in their depth, but proposes help only arbitrarily and wishfully.

CHARLES WARREN

Amherst, Massachusetts

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Dear Editors,

Some readers of my piece on Louis Armstrong in the summer issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW may have been puzzled by the quotation that I offered to illustrate singer Lillie Delk Christian's "improbable, hilarious down-Maine accent"—improbable because she was, presumably, a black vaudeville performer, hilarious because of the resulting incongruity. The illustrative quotation should have read: "Was it a dream, are are you really mine?" Obviously, the first "are" is really "or," the point being that Lillie Delk pronounced the two vowels exactly the same. But one "are" accidently got dropped in the printing, and the point (such as it was) disappeared with it. Nothing more pitiful than a small joke gone wrong.

WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN

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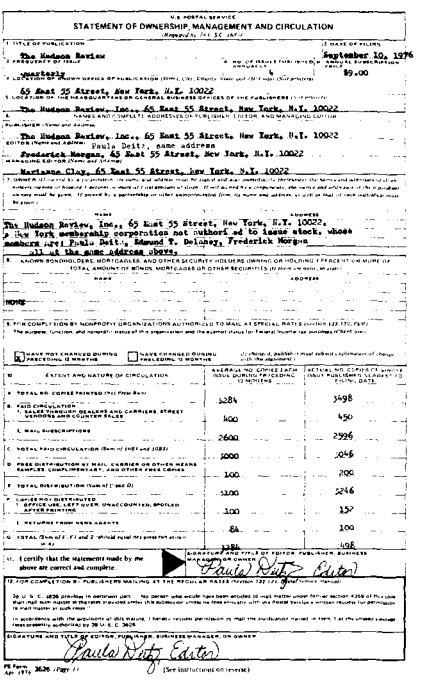

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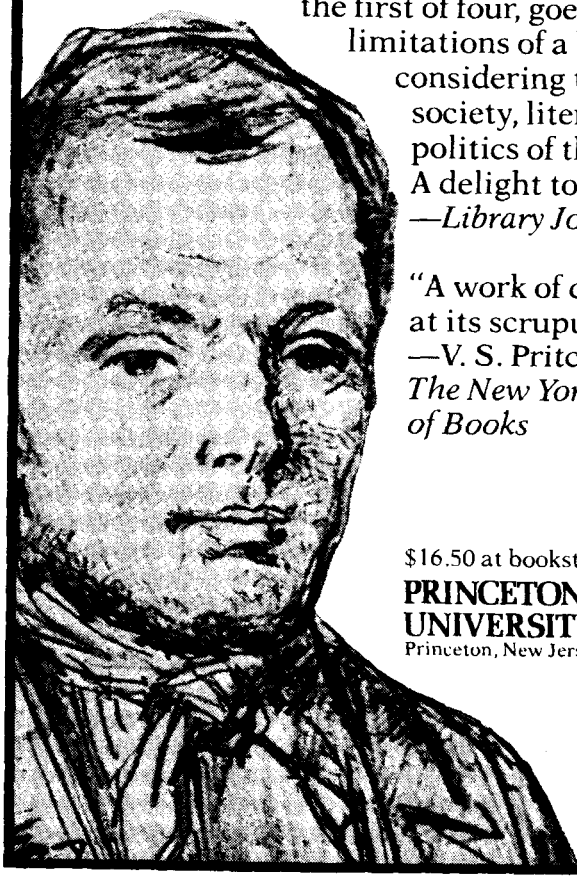

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JAMES BAKER HALL

In the Bardo of Flight

When the last fetters
of this world loosen,
when you look back
on what you thought
was your life and see
only a commotion
of blind particulars,
the old stories lost

when you are lifted
free to see the wing
tip suddenly,
the powers
of flight working you
upward,
each direction
coming at you like Kali
from all four,
the world
curving back into its
generalization—

the weather,
it seems then, is one thing
when you are earth bound,
like any local condition,
quite another when you are
in flight

and the plane,
an artifice of the spirit,
ascends & ascends thru a cloud,
the opalescent light brighter
and brighter, lifting you

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thru the many
toward the one—

until
suddenly in a thrill
of blue, you are finally
above it all: flying

in the sense of who you are
apart from where you are

in which all things sing
all things, sending you
horizon to horizon with
the sun's song, and on,
across the galaxy, every atom
heard from—

it is then,
that you can see your shadow
on the clouded world below
keeping track of you,

the same shape that like love
is forever changing,

can see
in your dark shape dancing
thru the world's weather
your death as the one
idea of you that contains
the many

that dark seed in the womb
of things forever
becoming

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JOHN GARDNER

Moral Fiction

Societies are created and destroyed by myth. The question a dying society must ask is (and let us assume for the moment that the fashionable wail is right and ours is dying), Where, Lord, did our fictions go wrong? How can we be saved? The answer is a little old-fashioned, but it's true.

True fiction—life-sustaining myth—is moral. One need not call up theory; one only need think of the fictions that have lasted, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, Virgil's *Aeneid,* Dante's *Commedia,* the plays of Shakespeare and Racine, the novels of Tolstoy, Melville, Thomas Mann . . . Yet it is not true, as optimists imagine, that the morality of fiction takes care of itself. Good fiction is always in competition with bad, and the writer of good fiction can easily fall into a disadvantage, since he can see the virtues in the kind of fiction he prefers not to write, can make up excuses and justifications for even the cheapest pornography—to say nothing of more pretentious, more "serious" false art—while the writer of trash is not always so careful to be just. It is a fact of life, as Melville pointed out in *Israel Potter,* that noble ideas, noble examples of human behavior, can drop out of fashion though they remain as real and applicable as ever—can simply come to be forgotten, plowed under by "progress."

I would not claim that even the worst bad fiction should be outlawed or burned; morality by compulsion is a fool's morality. But I do think the arguments for the best kind of fiction, one of the bases of true morality, need to be mentioned from time to time, because it seems to me true that art has an effect on society. No one who has studied the evidence can doubt that violence on TV has at least a strong tendency to breed violence in the streets, or that when poet after poet claims, wringing his hands, "America is dead," readers may begin to believe it. The effect of the best fiction is to humanize, to clear the air, increase our understanding and offer models of just behavior. To put it another way, mankind has always lived by myth, religious or poetic. By myth we shape our understanding of ourselves and lay the foundations of our future.

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By bad myths—by myths of man as innately evil and inescapably doomed, or of man as inherently irrational, violent, depraved, loveless, or of all man's values as seminally corrupt, so that loyalty, restraint, justice, compassion are all, as Nietzche thought, mere cyphers of cowardice and weakness—we plant the future in land mines.

Since "morality" has become a suspect term—a favorite cry of tyrannical oppressors from Russia and China to South Africa and Argentina—it is natural that you should ask, squinting suspiciously, exactly what I mean by "moral fiction." I mean two things, neither of which can stand without the other. First, moral fiction holds up models of decent behavior: characters whose basic goodness and struggle against confusion, error, and evil—in themselves and in others—give firm intellectual and emotional support to our own struggle. One thinks of such characters as Tolstoy's Pierre, in *War and Peace,* or Dostoevsky's brothers Karamazov. Sometimes—as in certain works of Chaucer and Shakespeare—the model is indirect, as when the moral confusion of the Pardoner or Macbeth leaves true morality at least partly to implication or at best in the hands of some minor character. Without denying for a moment that *The Pardoner's Tale* and *Macbeth* are masterworks that no writer living can come anywhere near, and realizing that my judgment is likely to annoy, I would call these morally secondary, though moral nonetheless. My reason is merely that it is easier and more natural to be moved to right action by the model of an admirable character than it is to be moved by recognition of an evil man's mistakes.

Life's imitation of art, after all, is direct and not necessarily intelligent. After Marlon Brando appeared in *On the Waterfront,* an entire generation took to slumping, mumbling, turning up its collar, and hanging its cigarette casually off the lip. After the appearance of Roy Rogers, a generation took to squinting. It is because of life's tendency to follow art that Tolstoy argued, in "What Is Art?," for establishing noble models. "By evoking under imaginary conditions the feeling of brotherhood and love, religious (i.e., moral) art will train men to experience those same feelings under similar circumstances in actual life. . . ." Today, though perhaps not in Shakespeare's day, the resolution never to behave like Macbeth does not inevitably carry any clear implication of what to do instead.

The first quality of moral fiction, then, is that it holds up useful

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models. These should not be stereotypic and sentimental models, needless to say, that is, models which merely confirm our unconsidered moral prejudices and cheap self-righteousness; and they will not be such models if the writer understands and submits himself to the second essential quality of moral art: to be moral a work of fiction must be the result of a creative process which is in total—and in specific ways—an intensely honest and rigorous mode of thought, an investigation in concrete (as opposed to abstract, or merely logical) philosophy.

For the person who looks at fiction mainly from the point of view of the reader or critic, it is easy to get the idea that fiction is serious, thoughtful, or "philosophical" merely because—and merely in the sense that—some writers of fiction are intelligent thinkers who express their profound ideas through stories. Thus Henry James "tells us" about American innocence, Melville "shows us" how the quality of life is affected by the proposition of an indifferent universe, and so on. What literary critics claim is true: writers do communicate ideas. What the writer understands, though the student or critic of literature need not, is that the writer discovers, works out, and tests his ideas in the process of writing. Thus at its best fiction is, as I've said, a way of thinking, a philosophical method.

It must be granted at once that some good and "serious" fiction is merely first-class propaganda—fiction in which the writer knows before he starts what it is that he means to say and does not allow his mind to be changed by the process of telling the story. A good deal of medieval literature works this way: the doctrine is stock, and the actions of ladies, gentlemen, and beasts are merely devices for communicating doctrine in a pleasing way. This is the method Boccaccio describes in his *Genealogy of the Gods* as the essential technique of allegory; it produces the kind of poetry Sidney defends in his *Defense:* instruction clothed in delight. *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels* (to some extent) are fictions of this kind, as are (to a large extent) such modern works as *Gravity's Rainbow* and John Barth's superb tract on justice between the sexes, *Chimera*. Fiction of this sort, dogmatic or ironic-dogmatic fiction, may be highly entertaining, may be fully persuasive, may have the clear ring of art, but such fiction is closer to the sermon than to the true short story or novel, closer to the verse essay as practiced by Pope than to the Elizabethan play. Such fiction may be—and usually is—*moral-*

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istic, and the writer, in creating it, may be morally careful, that is, may work hard at telling nothing but the truth; but in what I am describing as true moral fiction the "art" is not merely ornamental: it controls the argument and gives it its rigor, forces the writer to intense yet dispassionate and unprejudiced watchfulness, drives him—in ways abstract logic cannot match—to unexpected discoveries and, frequently, a change of mind.

Moral fiction communicates meanings discovered by the process of the fiction's creation. We can see the process working when we look through the drafts of a certain kind of writer's work. Thus we see Tolstoy beginning with one set of ideas and attitudes in *Two Marriages,* an early draft of *Anna Karenina*—in which Anna, incredible as it seems, marries Vronsky—and gradually discovering, draft by draft, deeper and deeper implications in his story, revising his judgments, stumbling upon connections reaching new insights, until finally he nails down the attitudes and ideas we find dramatized, with such finality and conviction that it seems to us unthinkable that they should not have burst full-grown from Tolstoy's head, in the published novel. So Dostoevsky agonized over the better and worse implications of Myshkin's innocence and impotence. We see the same when we look at successive drafts of work by Kafka, or even the two drafts of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde.*

The writing of a fiction is *not* a mode of thought when a good character and a bad one are pitted against each other. There is nothing inherently wrong with such fiction. It may be funny, or biting, or thrillingly melodramatic; it may be unspeakably witty, or grave, or mysterious, or something else; but it can contain only cleverness and preachments, not the struggle of thought. When fiction becomes thought—a kind of thought less restricted than logic or mere common sense (but also impossible to verify)—the writer makes discoveries which, in the act of discovering them in his fiction, he communicates to the reader.

He makes these discoveries in several ways. Much of what a writer learns he learns simply by imitation. Making up a scene, he asks himself at every step, "Would she really say that?" or "Would he really throw the shoe?" He plays the scene through in his imagination, taking all the parts, being absolutely fair to everyone involved (mimicking each in turn, as Aristotle pointed out, and never sinking to stereotype for even the most minor characters), and when he finishes the scene he understands by sympathetic imitation what each character has done throughout and why the

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fight, or accident, or whatever, developed as it did. The writer does the same with the total action, Aristotle's *energeia,* the actualization of the potential which exists in character and situation. Throughout the entire chain of causally related events, the writer asks himself, would *a* really cause *b* and not *c,* etc., and he creates what seems, at least by the test of his own normal imagination and experience of the world, an inevitable development of story. Inevitability does not depend, of course, on realism. Some or all of the characters may be fabulous—dragons, griffins, Achilles' talking horses—but once a character is established for a creature, the creature must act in accord with it.

To learn about reality by mimicking it, needless to say, the writer must never cheat, never play tricks. He may establish any sort of *givens* he may please, but once they are established he must follow where, in his experience, nature would lead if there really were, say, griffins. He cannot, for instance, make the reader accept some event on the basis of the writer's stylistic eloquence. By rhetoric any writer worth his salt can convince the reader that an eighty pound griffin falls twice as fast as a forty pound griffin, but if natural law in a world containing griffins is one of the premises the writer has accepted, the rhetoric is a betrayal of honest thought. Neither can the honest writer make the reader accept what he says took place if the writer moves from *a* to *b* by verbal sleight-of-hand, that is, by distracting the reader. It is easy for any clever writer to evoke and fully authenticate a situation (*a*), then digress to something else, then evoke and fully authenticate a situation which pretends to be the direct effect of *a,* a situation *b* which is in fact implausible as a result of *a* but does not seem implausible because the digression has blurred the real and inevitable effect of *a* in the reader's mind. No decent writer, admittedly, would play such games—except, by accident, on himself. Thus one of the ways in which fiction serves thought is this: its laws demand that the writer study out what *a* would lead to, and tell the truth. By style, energy, the power of his voice and the pressure of his feeling, an honest writer may heighten, sharpen, or clarify the importance of causal relationships; but style or no style, *a* must lead to *b* if the writer is claiming causality as the principle of his fiction's profluence. The writer who boasts, "I can make a lady pick up a coffee cup anytime I please" may be amusing, even spell-binding, but he is not, in one important way, serious. Worse, his work will be, in one important way, boring.

Aristotle of course understood this. It is his reason for objecting

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to a plot-solution by divine machinery. If Aristotle's position were still generally understood, we would need to say no more on this subject; but unfortunately in recent years Aristotle's ideas have fallen out of fashion among some modern writers, a group in some measure led by William Gass, whose theory of fiction as mere language has been widely influential—not, I think, because of any merit in Gass's argument but only because of the appealing verbal richness—the entertainment value—in Gass's way of presenting his outlandish notions.

Gass claims—and perhaps for some readers it is true—that when a writer describes a scene, the reader's imagination seizes only those details the writer has explicitly given, so that, for example, if the writer mentions that a character wears spectacles but says nothing else about that character, the reader forms no impression of the character's nose, eyes, forehead, stature, or clothes. If it is true that words are the writer's only material, then the only kind of richness or interest available to the writer is linguistic, and—given equal linguistic dazzle—there should be no difference between the emotional effect of a story about a lifelike character with some urgent problem (Gass would disapprove of the word "lifelike") and a character who admits or, indeed, insists that she has no existence except as words on a page—as does the central figure in Gass's experiment, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*. To think of a fictional character as a person—to weep for little Nell or shudder at the affrontery of Captian Ahab—is childishly naive, Gass claims.

The trouble with the theory is essentially this: that words have associations, and groups of words form chains of association. To say the word *crate* to a native English speaker is to summon up an image of a crate and, with it, the natural background of that image, which is a different background from that summoned up by *casque* or *trunk* or *cube*. etc. To say that a character is built like a crate is to suggest more than just the character's shape: it is to hint at his personality, his station in life, even his behavior. This becomes obvious when we place the character in some setting not at all natural for a crate and then linguistically reinforce the unnaturalness: *He sat at the tea table, trying to look small for all his bulk, as stiff and unnatural as a crate.* It is true only in a trivial sense that the writer's only material is words. Words conjure images in the reader's mind, and when the words are put together in the proper way, with the proper rhythms—long and short sounds, smooth or ragged, tran-

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quil or rambunctious—we have the queer experience of falling through the print on the page into something like a dream, an imaginary world so real and convincing that when we happen to be jerked out of it by a call from the kitchen or a knock at the door, we stare for an instant in befuddlement at the familiar room where we sat down, half an hour ago, with our book. To say that we shouldn't react to fictional characters as "real people" is exactly equivalent to saying that we shouldn't be frightened by the things that leap out at us in nightmares.

We will need to return later, in another connection, to this matter of language as the trigger of a dream, but for the moment the important point is this: if it is true that metaphor becomes reality when we read—if it is true, that is, that on encountering the words, *whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul, whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet,* we involuntarily form images of the things represented—then there is nothing inherently wrong with Aristotle's opinion that what chiefly interests us in fiction is characters in action or, more philosophically, "the actualization of the potential which exists in character and situation." If it is true that we *do* look at characters in fiction as if they were real, and feel curious about what they will do when their safety is threatened or their wishes are opposed, then the only possible objection to fiction which looks carefully at how things come about—how, given the drives and obsessions of Oedipus, situation *a* in his life leads with murderous inevitability to situation *b*—must be that such study is frivolous. (I would not say, myself, that frivolity is ever an argument against anything; but our object here is to discover whether, on any grounds, causality should be considered an undignified or wrong concern.)

What we learn when we look closely at the successive drafts of a writer like Tolstoy—and what one learns if one is oneself a writer who has tested each of his fictional scenes against his experience of how things seem to happen in the world—is that scrutiny of how people act and speak, why people feel precisely the things they do, how weather affects us at particular times, how we respond to some people in ways we would never respond to others, leads to knowledge, sensitivity, and compassion. In fiction we stand back, weigh things as we do not have time to do in life, and the effect of great fiction is to temper real experience, modify prejudice, humanize.

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One begins a work of fiction with certain clear opinions—for instance the opinion I myself began with in a recent novel, *October Light,* that traditional New England values are the values we should live by: good workmanship, independence, unswerving honesty, and so on—and one tests those values in lifelike situations, puts them under every kind of pressure one can think of, always being fair to the other side, and what one slowly discovers, resisting all the way, is that one's original opinion was oversimple. This is not to say, by any means, that there are no values; only to say that a simulation of real experience is morally educational. To the writer at least, such an experience proves that Aristotle was correct: fiction is a mode of thought—the artist's equivalent to the scientific method—and therefore anything but frivolous.

In this process I describe, the reader is at a disadvantage in that what he has before him is not all the possibilities entertained by the writer and recognized as wrong but only the story the writer eventually came to see as inevitable and right. But the good writer provides his reader, consciously and to some extent mechanically, with a dramatic equivalent of the intellectual process he himself went through. That equivalent is suspense.

Alas, it is even more embarrassing for a serious writer to speak of suspense, these days, than it is to speak of morality or plot. Thirty years ago, when I was an earnest young writer reading books on how to write, I was outraged, I remember, by talk of keeping the reader in suspense. Suspense, it seemed to me—and so those foolish writers on how to write made it seem—was a carrot held out to an idiot donkey, and I had no intention of treating may reader as anything but an equal. But suspense, rightly understood, is a serious business: one presents the moral problem—the character's admirable or unadmirable intent and the pressures of situation working for and against him (what other characters in the fiction feel and need, what imperatives nature and custom urge)—and rather than moving at once to the effect, one tortures the reader with alternative possibilities, translating to metaphor the alternatives the writer has himself considered. Superficially, the delay makes the decision—the climactic action—more thrilling; but essentially the delay makes the decision philosophically significant. Whether the character acts rightly or wrongly, his action reflects not simply his nature but his nature as the embodiment of some particular theory of reality and the rejection, right or wrong, of

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other theories. When the fiction is "tight," as the New Critics used to say, the alternatives are severally represented by the fiction's minor characters, and no character is without philosophical function. True suspense is identical with the Sartrean anguish of choice.

It goes without saying, though I will say it anyway, that even the most lofty and respectable theories of human motivation—from psychiatrists, biologists, theologians, and philosophers—must always be treated by the serious writer as suspect. The writer's sole authority is his imagination. He works out in his imagination what would happen and why, acting out every part himself, making his characters say what he would say himself if he were a young second-generation Italian, then an old Irish policeman, and so on. When the writer accepts unquestioningly someone else's formulation of how and why people behave, he is not thinking but dramatizing some other man's theory, that of Freud, Adler, Laing, or whoever. Needless to say, one may make some theory of motivation one's premise—an idea to be tested. But the final judgment must come from the writer's imagination. True moral fiction is a laboratory experiment too difficult and dangerous to try in the world but safe and important in the mirror-image of reality in the writer's mind. Only a madman would murder a sharp old pawn-brokeress to test the theory of the Superman; but Dostoevsky can without harm send his imaginary Raskolnikov into just that experiment in a thoroughly accurate but imaginary St. Petersburg.

The writing of fiction is a mode of thought because by imitating we come to understand the thing we imitate. Fiction is thus a convincing and honest but unverifiable science (in the old sense—knowledge): unverifiable because it depends on the reader's sensitivity and clear sense of how things are, a sense for which we have no tests. Some people claim our basic human nature is vicious, some claim otherwise. The cynic can be shown, by definition, to be a cynic, but he cannot be proved wrong. (So far, unhappily, it cannot even be proved conclusively that he grows ulcers more quickly than do nice people.) The kind of knowledge which comes from imitation thus depends for its quality on the sanity and stability of the imitator—according to some standard (Nietzsche would say) of sanity and stability. Clearly no absolute standard exists; but rough estimates are possible. If a writer regularly treats all life bitterly, scorning love, scorning loyalty, scorning decency (according to some standard)—or to put it another way; if some

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writer's every remark strikes most or many readers as unfair, cruel, stupid, self-regarding, ignorant, or mad—if he has no good to say to anything or anyone except the character who seems to represent himself—if he can find no pleasure in what happy human beings have found good for centuries (children and dogs, God, peace, wealth, comfort, love, hope, and faith)—then it is fair to hazard that he has not made a serious effort to sympathize and understand, that he has not tried to guess what special circumstances would make him behave, himself, as his enemies behave. Whatever some possible divinity might say of such a writer's fictions, the nonomniscient can say this much: he is not using fiction as a mode of thought but merely as a means of preaching his peculiar doctrine.

For Aristotle, imitation was the primary way in which the writer of a fiction makes discoveries. There are other ways. When the writer asks himself, "Would she really say that?" or "Would he really throw the shoe?" his imagination is working close to the conscious surface. Given a clearly defined character and circumstance, it takes no genius to determine whether or not she would say that or he would throw the shoe. We all have a sense of the probable. If a fierce, violently angry man whose society and family demands eye-for-eye revenge meets his brother's murderer and is invited to tea, any fool can guess that in all likelihood he will not at once accept the invitation and let bygones be bygones. And the same is true in far more subtle situations. When characters behave out of character, readers notice. They may blink the mistake and accept what the writer claims to have happened, but readers do know. If they read on, they do so for lack of something better to read. A strong imagination make characters do what they would do in real life. A subtler work of the imagination—a subtler way in which the writing of fiction is a morally serious mode of thought—is symbolic association.

There is a game, often played in the nineteen-fifties by members of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, called "What Kind of Smoke Are You?" It works as follows. The player who is "it" chooses some famous person with whom everyone playing must surely be acquainted (Harry Truman, Madame Mao, Charles de Gaulle, for instance) and tells the other players "I am a dead American," "I am a living Asian," "I am a dead European," and then each of the other players in turn asks one question of the person who is "it," such as, "What kind of smoke are you?" (cigarette, pipe, cigar—or,

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more specifically, L & M, Dunhill, White Owl) or "What kind of weather are you?" "What kind of insect are you?" or "What kind of transportation?" The person who is "it" answers not in terms of what kind of smoke his character would *like,* if any, but what kind of smoke he would *be* if, instead of being human, he were a smoke, or what kind of weather, insect, transportation, and so forth, he would be if reincarnated as one of those. Thus, for example, Kate Smith if an insect would be a turquoise beetle; Marlon Brando, if weather, would be sultry and uncertain, with storm warnings out; and Harry Truman would be (whatever he may in fact have driven) a Model T Ford. What always happens when this game is played by sensitive people is that the whole crowd of questioners builds a stronger and stronger feeling of the character, by unconscious association, until finally someone says the right name—"Kate Smith!" or "Madame Mao!"—and everyone in the room feels instantly that that's right. There is obviously no way to play this game with the reasoning faculty, since it depends on largely unconscious associations or intuition; and what the game proves conclusively for everyone playing is that our associations are remarkably similar. When one of the players falls into some mistake, for instance saying that Mr. Brezhnev of the U.S.S.R. is a beaver instead of, more properly, a crafty old woodchuck, all the players at the end of the game are sure to protest, "You misled us when you said 'beaver.' " The game proves more dramatically than any argument can suggest the mysterious rightness of a good metaphor—the one requisite for the poet, Aristotle says, that cannot be taught.

The mainly unconscious or intuitive associations which show up in the game "What Kind of Smoke Are You?" hint at one of the ways in which the writing of fiction is a mode of thought. No one can achieve profound characterization of a person (or place) without appealing to semi-unconscious associations. To sharpen or intensify a characterization, a writer makes use of metaphor and reinforcing background—weather, physical objects, animals—details which either mirror character or give character something to react to. To understand that Marlon Brando *is* a certain kind of weather is to discover something (though something neither useful nor demonstrable) and in the same instant to communicate something. Thus one of the ways in which fiction thinks is by discovering deep (metaphoric) identities. Any given character may happen to be found, of course, in any setting; but a good writer chooses the setting which makes character and situation clear. (I do not mean

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that a character ought to be discovered in the setting that best reveals him. A man of the mountains may be found in an automat; but if the man's nature is to be clear to the reader, the mountains must be somehow implied.) When fiction is truly a mode of understanding, Raskolnikov can only be a creature of Russia and St. Petersburg; he would not be the same young man at all if raised in Copenhagen. Given a character who's shy and silent, interested in chemistry, socially retiring but happy with his family, it makes all the difference in the world whether he wears brown or gray. When a writer meets a stranger, the writer should be able to tell quite soon—within reasonable limits—how the stranger's living room is furnished.

What possible moral value can there be, it may be asked, in knowing how a stranger's living room is furnished? The answer is of course that it depends on how the knowledge is put to use. We study people carefully for two main reasons: in order to understand them and fully experience our exchange with them, or in order to feel ourselves superior. The first purpose can contribute to art and is natural to art, since the soul of art is celebration and discovery through imitation. The second, perhaps more common, is a mark of petty-mindedness, insecurity, or vice and is the foundation of art that has no value. Both artistic acts, the real and the fraudulent, are obviously egoistic: the true artist is after "glory," as Faulkner said, that is, the pleasure of noble achievement and good people's praise; the false artist is after power and the yawping flattery of his carnivore pack.

The understanding which comes through the discovery of right metaphors can lead the writer to much deeper discoveries, discoveries of the kind made by interpreters of dreams—discoveries, that is, of how one dark metaphor relates to another, giving clues to the landscape of the writer's unconscious and, through these clues, hypotheses on the structure of reality. Pursuit of these clues and hypotheses is the third element—and perhaps the most eerie—in the total creative process which makes fiction a mode of thought.

This is how it works. The writer, let us say, plans his story (some writers do, other writers don't, preferring to make up the story as they go), then writes it in rough draft, employing all his powers of imagination to give clarity and richness, or, to put it another way, make the characters, settings, and events seem real. He knows, for instance, that it is not enough to say *Her father was a drunkard,* since the mere abstract statement does not conjure the image of a drunk-

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ard in the reader's mind; instead, the writer must add some concrete image, perhaps some metaphoric expression as well—*she remembered him sitting at the kitchen table, gray as a stone, with his hat on.* Or, again, the writer knows it is not enough to say that some character smoked a pipe; he must, for instance, show the pipe smoke clouding around the face. So the writer continues, character by character, scene by scene, event by event, constantly insisting on concrete images, perhaps backing them with poetic suggestion, until the draft is complete. Many writers stop here, perhaps including some great ones, but it's a mistake. If the writer looks over his story carefully, again and again, reading aloud, his whole soul as tense as any stalking beast, he will begin, inevitably, to discover odd connections, strange and seemingly inexplicable repetitions. On page four he finds the drunkard, gray as a stone, with his hat on; and on page 19 he finds, say, an image of a hushed gray mountain with a hat of low clouds.

In art repetition is always a signal, intentional or not, and when the moral artist finds in his work some such accident of language as the one I've just fabricated, he refuses to rest until he has somehow understood—or can emotionally confirm—the accident. He asks himself consciously—perhaps writes it down on a slip of yellow paper—"Why is this particular drunken father like this particular mountain?" Occasionally the question remains stubbornly unanswerable, and the writer, convinced by the prickling of his thumbs that the mysterious equation is significant, God knows how, will simply let it stand, or will perhaps reinforce it with some further related image which feels equally right, God knows why. There's nothing wrong in this. At a certain point in human thought, rationality breaks down and can speak to us only of the mundane. But whether or not the writer can finally answer the questions his writing fishes up from the bog of the unconscious, he asks them carefully, again and again. He reevaluates, in the light of the messages he has received from the swamp, all that his fiction has labored to maintain. If he has claimed, for instance, that a particular character is sterile and empty, yet accidents of language or of image-echo have secretly identified that character with forces of fecundity and fullness, the writer tries the hypothesis that his first opinion was wrong. He plays part against part, hunting out each part's secrets, until something clicks.

In short, the discoveries or "epiphanies" in great fiction are not planned in advance: they evolve. So Anna, to Tolstoy's surprise,

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commits suicide, though he'd been brooding on that mangled young body on the tracks for years. So Mrs. Eustace, to Trollope's astonishment, stole her own diamonds.

This is not, for the moral writer, a mere device, a way of coming up with interesting surprises for the audience. It reflects a fundamental conviction of the artist that the mind does not impose structures on reality (as existentialists claim), arbitrarily maintaining now this, now that, but rather, as an element of total reality, a capsulated universe, discovers, in discovering itself, the world. The artist's theory, as revealed by his method (however artists may deny it), is that the things he thinks when he thinks most dispassionately—not "objectively," quite, but with passionate commitment to discovering whatever may happen to be true (not merely proving that some particular thing is true)—that the ideas the artist gets, to put it another way, when he thinks with the help of the full artistic method, are absolutely valid, true not only for himself but for everyone, or at least for all human beings—and some artists would go further. (Tolstoy never doubted his understanding of dogs and horses.)

To someone who has never written real poetry or fiction, all this may seem doubtful; but it is a method that can be studied wherever great writers have left sketches and consecutive drafts. That the method is still common is easily verified: simply ask writers how they work, if you can get them not to lie. The method is not always as conscious as I've made it seem, of course. Some writers may claim that they simply keep tinkering until everything works. But however the given writer expresses it, this feeling-out of the fiction's implications, this refusal to let the fiction go until it has proved itself a closed and self-sustaining system, an alternative reality, an organism, this is the true writer's check on himself, and his road to understanding. It is here that fake art hopelessly breaks down. One does not achieve the dense symbolic structure of *Death in Venice, The Sound and the Fury,* or *Under the Volcano* by planning it all out on butcher paper—though one does make careful plans. True writing, as William Gaddis says, is:

> like living with a God damned invalid . . . eyes follow you around the room wave his God damned stick figure out what the hell he wants, plump the God damned pillow change bandage read aloud move a clause around wipe his chin new paragraph . . . .

I will mention one last check on fiction's honesty: tradition. No

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writer imagines he exists in a literary void. Though writers rarely read as widely as do critics, partly because writers can afford to be critical, throwing out books because of annoying little flaws of conception or execution, it is nevertheless true that writers would not be what they are if they didn't have a liking for books. A particular writer may read no one but George Gissing or, perhaps, Aristophanes; but he knows full well that one of the things he's doing when he writes is laboring to achieve an effect at least somewhat similar to effects he has gotten out of other people's books. When a writer begins a story *It was winter of the year 1833. A large man stepped out of a doorway,* that writer has a literary tradition in mind, and part of his purpose is to be—besides interesting and original—true to the tradition (or anyway steadily aware of it). When he begins a story, *She was no longer afraid of the long drive home,* he has another distinct tradition in mind, and still another when he begins, *"Henry, come clean off them boots," Mrs. Cobb called out the woodshed door.* The medium of literary art is not language but language plus the writer's experience and imagination and, above all, the whole of the literary tradition he knows. Just as the writer comes to discoveries by studying the accidental implications of what he's said, he comes to discoveries by trying to say what he wants to say without violating the form to which he's committed. It isn't true that, as New Critics used to say with great confidence, "Form is content." The relationship between the two is complex almost beyond description. It *is* true, as Wallace Stevens said, that "A change of style is a change of subject."

The process of discovery through a struggle with tradition is most obvious in the retelling of some traditional myth. In my own retelling of the story of *Jason and Medeia* I shackled myself with one basic rule: I would treat the same events treated in the past (by Apollonios and Euripides), making sure that the characters said approximately the same things, performed the same actions, and made the same friends and enemies among men and gods; but all that happened I would try to understand with a modern sensibility (granting the existence of gods as forces), asking myself how *I,* in these situations, could say and do what these antique figures did. In what sense could I understand the Sirens, or Circe, or the Golden Fleece? What would make me, as a modern woman (as a writer one claims androgyny), kill my children? The result of this process is that one gets the impression, rightly or wrongly, that one has to some extent penetrated what is common in human experience

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throughout time; and since again and again the ancient poets seem right, and "modern sensibility" seems a fool's illusion, one gets the impression that one has come to grasp, more firmly than before, fragments of the ancient poets' wisdom.

The same process is at work, less obviously, when one decides to write a "gothic," a murder mystery, a family saga, or a country yarn, and at work much more subtly when one commits oneself to a conventional realistic novel—or for that matter to a serious poem in tetrameter quatrains without rhyme. What has gone before exerts its light pressure, teasing the mind just as Tarot cards do toward queer new visions of the familiar.

Such are my arguments for what I have described as "the best kind of fiction." I don't mean in all this to be unduly sober-minded. I have nothing against limericks, tales of boys and dogs, or *Star Trek*. I do object strongly to the cult of sex and violence, and more strongly yet to the cult of cynicism and despair. But I do not really think censorship is the answer. I am convinced that good art easily beats out bad, and that the present scarcity of first-rate literature does not follow from a sickness of society but the other way around. In the past few decades we have shaken off, here in America, the childish naivety and prudishness we see in, for instance, movies of the thirties and forties, where the killers say "Jeez" and the reporters say "Gosh," but in our pursuit of greater truth we have fallen to the persuasion that the cruellest, ugliest thing we can say is likely to be the truest. Real art has never been fooled by such nonsense: real art has internal checks against it.

Real art creates myths a society can live instead of die by, and clearly our society is in need of such myths. What I have tried to show here is that such myths are not mere hopeful fairy tales but products of careful and disciplined thought, that a properly built myth, in other words, is worthy of belief, at least tentatively, that working at art is a moral act, that a work of art is a moral example, and that false art can be known for what it is if one remembers the standards. The black abyss stirs a certain fascination, admittedly, or we would not pay so many writers so much money to keep staring at it. But the black abyss is merely life as it is or as it soon may become, and staring at it does nothing, merely confirms that it is there. It seems to me time that artists start taking that fact as pretty firmly established, and stop fooling around.

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PABLO ANTONIO CUADRA

Songs of Cifar and the Sweet Sea

To Carlos, my brother, who lived as few have done the adventurous life of our Sweet Sea. And in memory of Cifar Guevara, alias El Cachero; of Juan de Dios Mora; of Felipe Potoy and of Sinforosa Salabanca, his wife; of Leonidas Cruz, father of my godchild; of Pascasio; of Eladio; of Christopher; all deceased; that they may rest in peace, companions of my navigating youth.

"It is not strange in the waters
of night to hear a song.
The sailor lowers the sails,
the oarsman waits.
It is Cifar, alone, adrift,
yielding to be carried
by music and wind."
(Sailor's Barcarole)

The Birth of Cifar

There is an island in the shallows
slender
as the hand of an Indian god.
It offers red fruit
to the birds
and to the shipwrecked
the sweet shade of trees.
There Cifar was born,
the sailor.
His mother's time came
while rowing alone to Zapatera.
She steered the boat to a pool
while sharks and shad
circled,
drawn by the blood.

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Horses in the Lake

The horses go down at dawn.
They enter the golden lake and move on,
wave against wave
of reared neck and manes
into the dazzling light:
naked boys
bathe their haunches
and they raise
drunk with light
their antique figures.
They listen,
ears attentive,
to the delicate clarion of morning
and watch
the vast field of battle.
Then they dream
—a distant boldness
breaks through—
soaring back
to the heroic days
when swords
returned the sun's thrusts
white stallions
squadrons of silver
and distant cries
of birds
and wind.
But they return
(The whip
is time)
with the blow
they file toward land,
heads bowed,
and yoked
to the wagon
the dream

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behind
remains
asleep
the wind.

The Sickness

What urges me to leave?
Fingers in the harp,
and at once there begins
the thirst for horizons.

One
sail
afar
enough

The Departure

Said Cifar's mother:
—Leave the waters!
Cifar sounded a conch
and, laughing, exclaimed:
—The Lake is adventure.
—You prefer, she said,
defiance to certainty.
—I prefer
the strange to the known.
Cifar hoisted a jib
and just the slap of sails
like mad doves
filled him with joy.
—Mother: your language speaks
of the solid roof, the house,
women. (They say

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the islands are women's tombs.)
Man is a ship.
—It's a risk! she cried.
Cifar smiled; putting the harp in the prow
and doubling his body he pulled the chain
that lifted the anchor.
Once more a child
left his mother's womb
for the world . . .

Cries

In the night
while we sailed
we stood listening to songs
very far from land.
A star wounded
the dark waters
where they were shipwrecked:
the three girls from Tarca
guitar players.

The Master of Tarca (I)

Seated on the stone of the Eagle
the Master of Tarca would tell us:

It is fitting
and right
that the sailor
grasp
things by their names.
In time of danger
things without names
are those that harm.

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The Girls

The girls of the archipelago
return from mass
rowing
like floating flowers
like garlands
in bright colors
say goodbye
from your island
and you shall raise a flight
of fresh cries
like birds

Manuscript in a Bottle

I had seen coconut trees and tamarinds
and mangoes
and white sails drying in the sun
the smoke of breakfast across the sky
at dawn
and fish jumping in the net
and a girl in red
who would go down to the shore and go up with a jug
and pass behind a grove
and appear and disappear
and for a long time
I could not sail without that image
of the girl in red
and the coconut trees and tamarinds and mangoes
that seemed to live only
because she lived
and the white sails were white only
when she lay down
in her red dress and the smoke was blue

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and the fish and the reflection of the fish
were happy
and for a long time I wanted to write a poem
about that girl in red
and couldn't find the way to describe
the strange thing that fascinated me
and when I told my friends they laughed
but when I sailed away and returned
I always passed the island of the girl in red
until the day I entered the bay of her island
and cast anchor and leaped to land
and now I write these lines and launch them through the waves
in a bottle
because that is my story
because I am gazing at the coconut trees and the tamarinds
and the mangoes
the white sails drying in the sun
the smoke of breakfast across the sky
and time passes
and we wait and wait
and we grunt
and she does not come with ears of corn
the girl in red.

The Call

Cifar
quiet your song.
Cifar
do not cover
your ears with music:
That limitless
Blue
your call.

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Eufemia

"Et merito, quoniam potui fugisse puellam . . ."

I happened to borrow Pascasio's boat
and now I curse my fate!
I look at the furious waves and the black
winds of October. At what moment
did I prefer this implacable weather
to the rage of Eufemia?
To what port do I go, to what tomb
is this damned storm taking me?
How much better to bear
your screams, Eufemia; how much better
your anger, your disheveled
wrath at dawn
than the turbulent waves and these cries
under lightning and wind.
By now I would have managed your rage,
by now we would be in kisses,
by now I would be sleeping calmly
after the storm;
instead I cry to God
repentant, vomiting my cowardice
over the rail while the black sky
only reminds me of your furious eyes . . .

The Master of Tarca (III)

Master, said Cifar,
I followed your advice
and crossed the Lake
searching for the unknown island.
I sailed with gentle wind
to the farthest one, virgin and lost

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But
that I had known that island
I would swear!
That its sonorous cliff
sent back my song one day
I would swear!
That she was the same woman
who waited for me there
I would almost swear!"
The master smiled and said:
That which is known
is the unknown.

Angelina on the Cliffs

Ask me:
—What do you hunt
barefoot
in the jagged rocks
of the cliffs?
—Would I gash
my feet, would I climb
in wind and rain
to scour the lake
if that crazy Cifar . . .
(and she weeps)
. . . he came to find me
wanting
to have me.
He fought me to the sand;
I sank my teeth in him, scratching
his face and, furious,
he set sail over the waves
midway through a storm.
—I hope he will not be lost
in that tempest!

I thank him!

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Abduction

Over the hills
in the pale sky
shines the morning star.

I drop anchor; at the sound
birds screech
herons fly
cattle bleat
in the distant sand.
From the cabin
comes Fidelia combing her hair
in the fresh air of dawn.

She came with me
last night. They fired shots
at me, launching their boats.
But "The Siren" is fast.

I have an island for her.

Writing on a Tree

The truth of the legend
I swear to now.

Bantering sailors told me:
—If you speak to her
she will turn into a tree.

See me under its shadow!

Never has the heart
given so much fruit!

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The Master of Tarca (IV)

Spoke the Master
of Tarca:

Grasp the cicada
by the wing
At least
you carry in your hand
the song.

The Child

The child
I was
undead
remains
in the chest
he takes the heart
for his own
and sails inward
I hear him cross
my nights
or his old
seas of tears
towing me
to dreams.

The Master of Tarca (V)

Seated on the stone of the Eagle
the Master of Tarca would tell us:

It is fitting
and right
that the sailor

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should leave his adventure
to the waters.
Wake made
time lived
wake dissolved
time erased.

The Wedding of Cifar

". . . and they thrashed with oars the sea, killer of virgins."
—*Lycophron*

—Stop weeping! cried the women
and we heard their laughter
by the reflection
of torches
and through the strokes of oars.
They were taking Ubaldina, with guitars
with her bridal veil
and a bunch of white lilies.
Eladio, the river carpenter
and Pascasio, the one-armed sailor
built the boat.
I worked the mast
and my mother
trimmed the sail on the sand.
We set sail
when the dawn lights broke through
but October
raised the winds.
Squalls, torrents,
waves
lightning
the Lake
enraged
and black
struck to kill
and tore

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the sails and broke the halyards.
At sunset the hurricane
roared.
—Shit! cried Eladio. —We sink!
But the old man, Pas, serene
with his one arm at the helm
told the men:
—The Lake has swallowed
the bait,
the boat is virgin,
the girl is maiden.
Then they opened the hatchway and put us
into the dark belly:
the wooden hull
smelled of tar.
I thrust Ubaldina, terrified,
and—more than love—
the waves helped me.
Then I opened the window,
put my arm outside
and threw the veil to the water.
So I begat Rugél
a man so strong in danger
but so weak with women.

My Woman is that One

The one with the kerchief.
The one who sometimes looks
toward my boat
and talks
with the women
as if she doesn't see me.
My woman is that one.
The one who laughs
now
that the anchor falls
filling the cove with echoes.

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The Letter

Eufemia writes me
that I should return.
I answer: On land
repeating footsteps,
man opens pathways.
The waters have no paths.
The Lake
keeps no tracks.

Message to Christopher

Christopher:
your godson
is behind bars again
without money. Who's to blame?
You know. Eufemia!
I wanted to say goodbye
to the past
but turned my eyes
and saw the birds
wheeling over the wake.

The Rebel

Dawn has not yet
awakened the heart
of the birds, and already Cifar
hurls the net on the dark
water. He knows it is the hour
of the siren, and does not fear
silence.
Cifar waits
for a signal from the distant

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mountains. Before dawn
the rebels will kindle
their bonfires.
He takes them fish
and weapons.

Tomasito, the Cook

—In what boat did they carry them?
Answer, Tomás, answer!
—From what island did they set sail?
Damn it, Tomás, answer!
—To whom did they deliver them:
Son of a bitch, Tomás!
—Who carried the weapons?
You pimp, answer, Tomás!

But Tomás won't talk.
What balls! He doesn't talk.
Now he never will talk
Tomás!

Ducks

When the cries of men
raise
the cormorants
and ducks
shit their fear
in the waters
then they rise
fly
in
a
V
like a long
arrow

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hurled at the horizon
recovering
at that height
order
freedom
and song.

The Island of the "Gavilanes"

The "Gavilanes"
abandoned this island.
(Juan was helmsman of the "boat"
Alfonso the most skillful
fisherman of shad. Felipe
the owner of "The Siren"
the fastest sailing ship
in these waters.
Today Juan steers a taxi
in Managua and charges
one peso a trip.
Alfonso is a lost drunk
Felipe is the owner
of a brothel "The Siren.")

Cifar's Nostalgia

"At times the boat
smells of piers"
said Cifar, yearning
for Fidelia, wishing
to turn back to the hearth and see
his son who already was rowing in the islands.
The cormorants were returning,
and the herons
whistling
in search of their nests.

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Mirna

Crying "Bitch!"
to the violent waves
insulting the black
west wind
he tore the sail twice
and ventured into the terrible
shallows of Enero
because Mirna, the prostitute
expected him in the port.

Misfortune

In Alta Gracia
I got into a fight
at the saloon. *The Harpist*
is in jail.
Entangled by the women
I injured a man.
—Get that bastard!
They took me.
The injured man
was the son of the Mayor.
It is in jail, my friends,
where tangos are born.
Now my dear
mates
are ashamed of me.
Eufemia
doesn't even want to know my name.
Fidelia is very far
and my mother dead.
Only Mirna
sneaks out of the brothel
and brings me food.

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The Master of Tarca (VII)

The Master of Tarca
would tell me:

The Alegradora
pleases with her body,
not with her memory.

With her hands she beckons
with her eyes she invites,
not with her memory.

The Alegradora
is the port
land
of the poor only
at night.

The Procession

Twelve maidens
in white
and a boat covered
with branches.
They sing and row.
Following it,
Venancio Arana's
cedar boat
with arcs of flowers
and canopies
of palms
twelve boys
oarsmen
and the Blessed Sacrament

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and then
the island boats
and the people
singing
"There go the three Marias
that bordered the sea . . ."
It is the Thursday
of Corpus Christi
and Ubaldina
my daughter
goes in white
singing.

I laugh at Cifar
who cries!

Written by Cifar about his Daughter, Ubaldina

To Milagros

You gave her to me
oh God
my daughter with the heavens
of my country in her eyes,
no indolent calm blue sky
but a dark
roaring
storm.

You gave her to me
oh God
my daughter with the spirit
of the boat
on which I crossed rough
waters of time.

Forbid, Lord, that wind
from hurling her

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as it has hurled me
to the ravenous.

Give her a gentle bay
where the water reflects her boat
hatching another, a peaceful inlet
where the sun
may dry her nets.

Fisherman

An oar floats
over the waters:
his epitaph

[*Translated from the Spanish by Grace Schulman*]

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EUGENE K. GARBER

The Host

Homage à Teilhard de Chardin

I

So Stedford House was to be occupied again. For a month John Gannett had thought that he would keep it empty until his death. That would seem selfish to some, but he would not live much longer, and then he would leave the house as well as his own quarters to the foundation along with several millions. His maiden sister had died three years ago. There was nothing now to divide the fortune which his father had seeded and he had nurtured. That was the consolation for being the last of an atrophied plant. The division of stem and flower ceased. The whole blossom fell intact into hands not consanguinous and therefore grateful.

His decision not to offer the house again to the foundation, but to rest on past and posthumous generosities, held firm for the month during which he wandered the rooms day after day taking in the redolence of the great priest. But at last the saner side of his mind warned him that he was engaged in a diseased parasitism—especially diseased in view of the fact that the host was entirely absent. Indeed the great priest, with a scrupulousness that he could have wished less precise, had taken away everything: books, personal effects, every scrap of paper, and even—with the aid of an air freshener—the pungence of his pipe. Would that the penultimate occupant, a dour classicist, had been as meticulous, but that one had broadcast into every corner the evil odors of his decaying person. Yet, ironically, the priest was the older of the two by far, but his flesh at the edges of his cassock had always seemed to Gannett a brilliant bone white, stripped clean by the leopards of the spirit.

So Gannett determined to relinquish the house again to the foundation, but he could not deny that those bright first days after the priest's departure had been filled with a marvelous vicarious delight. He had, of course, during the year of the great man's

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residency read the master work, and so he brought with him to the unoccupied house many images. Here, for instance, the priest had sat at the desk beneath the window looking out past the garden to the broken stones of the sea wall. Perhaps he had seen against the horizon Australopithecus dancing hand in hand with other little hominids in the first circle, the first intuition of the wholeness from which they sprang and toward which in the long arch of evolution they returned. Here he had eaten his spare suppers watching the ancient oak rustle in the sea breeze. Surely it was the image for him of the great tree of life which took root in the confused sea of giant molecules and branched upward season by season in growing companionship with the Son. Here he slept under the blessedly blank high ceiling, resting from process, revisiting the primeval darkness where consciousness is a black vibration, unseen, unheard, felt only as a rumbling disturbance of earth in a distant millennium.

But not long after Gannett began to wander the house, his own sleep was disturbed by a massive and obsessive yeasting of biotic forms, crowded and confused at first, full of a deafening gabble, but emerging finally into a prehistoric tropical ambiance. Within several nights a jungle emerged more brilliant than any imagined by "Le Douanier" Rousseau. Animal life stirred, at first shyly, behind the fronds of huge ferns. Then the beasts appeared more boldly—opossums, kangaroos, wombats, Tasmanian wolves, all marsupials. Presently a whole phylum of marsupials passed before him—long-snouted insectivores, semi-aquatic herbivores, lumbersome pachyderms munching rich bouquets of greenery, and finally fierce carnivores including even a bloody-eyed saber-toothed predator of immense speed. At first each bore in its pouch its young, which assured a domestic distance between the dreamer and his dream animals. But then they began to come empty. They transgressed his dreamer's distance and bore down on him with hungry eye and empty pouch. As though maddened in some evolutionary cul-de-sac, they attacked him. He woke up rolling in sweat. He locked Stedford house, left his own quarters across the bramble in the care of his keeper Haig, called the foundation, and booked passage to London with a good supply of tranquilizers. Blessedly the dreams ceased. The stay in London was deliberately literary and historical.

It was four months now since the departure of the great priest, and Gannett was returning home from London to meet the new

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occupant of Stedford House. The foundation had forwarded the usual dossier, but he had not looked at it. Though he had broken the diseased element in his relationship with the priest, still he kept within him the golden kernel of the presence and the master work. He was not ready to learn details of the person who had supplanted the great man. He would meet his new beneficiary cold. He would read the dossier later—or never, if the man was dull. He did not expect to be very interested ever again in the occupant of Stedford House. Linguist, historian, political scientist, classicist—let them all fade quickly in the shadow of the great paleontologist and man of God.

Even so, his interest was piqued when he learned from Haig, the old Scotch keeper, that the foundation had sent a menage of four, a young literary scholar Peter Stern, his wife Ruth, his son David, and his wife's younger sister, Abbey Kristol. They all came to the garden gate when he rang the bell, but not before he had overheard Stern say, "I tell you, Abbey, his God is more arbitrary than Job's." So Gannett had sighed even before he saw them—how easy it would be to keep distant this time. Stern was a thin man with dark eyes coiling upon themselves, upon that exquisite and elaborate intellectualism which has no referent but words—words upon words. His wife, a heavy woman, was the vanguard. "This grant of yours is a life-saver for Peter, Mr. Gannett. Everybody and his brother has written about Kafka, a lot of psychoanalytic garbage, but you have to read it all before you can write a word. At school the students hang on him like flies."

"An agony and a glory. The young know instinctively where to find intellectual nourishment," said Gannett, nodding, almost bowing, money to mind, but with a touch of ironical exaggeration caught by the husband, not the wife.

It was the two youngsters who threatened Gannett's detachment. David was shy and pubescent, his feelings glowing near the surface like a constant blush. He stood silently, peering out from eyes even more deeply tunneled than his father's. Gannett's sympathy went out. Abbey Kristol said, "I love your wall by the sea, Mr. Gannett." What teeth she had, like an apparition from Poe, huge, perfectly ranked, and glistening with a pearly polish as though wetted by perpetual hunger.

"I hope you will all be comfortable."

"We're already comfortable," said Ruth. "Come in and have tea or a beer."

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Gannett shook his head. "Rule of the estate: the visiting scholar is to suffer no disturbance." The eyes of the man who studied the arbitrariness of God showed gratitude, but Gannett did not stop to seal his beneficence. He summoned a blush. He was frightened in his celibate millionaire's soul, let them think, by offers of domestic propinquity. He rushed away. At home he shook his head. It was quite impossible: study the sad Jew of Prague on the majestic cliffs of this coast and with such company—a wife with feelings as approximate as her body, a boy entering the fever age, and a girl with the dripping teeth of a carnivore.

Gannett put out of mind the Kafkan and his curious retinue. He was absorbed again by the pleasures of paleontology, reading more about the recent discoveries of the coelacanths and the like. Left to these enthusiasms, he might have passed the entire year without revisiting Stedford House. But Haig, serving breakfast one morning, muttered something about odd disturbances.

"What is it, Andrew?"

"The boy, running everywhere."

"What did you expect of a boy of fourteen?"

"Nay, I don't mean kids' skitterings."

"What do you mean then?"

"Sneaking about, spying."

"Must be exciting for him—catching me with a book, you working in the garden."

"Not us, his own people."

"What would he be doing spying on his own people?"

Haig shook his head. "I don't know, but he's at it like a demon, behind stones and sea wall, in trees, and amongst bushes—darting and panting like to be caught was his death."

Gannett smiled wistfully. "It must be the game of a lonely boy, Andrew. He is the scout and they are the fell enemy."

Haig grunted. Gannett's mind leaped backwards to his own boyhood. He was in a velvet jacket by the sea wall, there was an old sailor beside him with a string in his hand, the sea rose in the distance—or was that only a painting? He shook his head sadly. Easier to see the great awkward coelacanth clambering at the water's edge than to see himself as a boy on the cliff by the big house. The great priest was right. We are more deeply rooted in the tree of life than in our own histories.

So the image of the spying boy did not leave much of an impression and might have faded altogether had Gannett not in the course

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of an unusual morning walk surprised young David spying with an old long glass from a covert of blanched stone. It was bright September, sea and sky blue and windless. Gannett chuckled. The boy jumped up into the sunlight as though to run, but settled again on a rock and challenged Gannett with his dark eyes.

"Well, David, how is the enemy deployed this morning? Man-of-war in the offing? A long boat with a landing party in the bay? Or have the devious devils crawled ashore by night to rustle among the trees?" But the boy had been spying on the house. Gannett knew that. The boy knew he knew. Gannett held out his hand. "May I see your long glass?"

David handed it over without hesitation. Gannett put it to his eye, screwed out the lens to correct for his myopia, and said, "My father got this from a Dutchman. Each evening before dinner he would stand at the window 'sweeping the bay,' as he said."

"Was he worried about keeping his treasure from pirates?"

"No, the treasure was already safe in the vaults of New York banks. 'Sweeping the bay' was a sort of daily tribute to the origin of the treasure." Gannett handed the glass back to the boy. "Tell me, David, what are you looking for?" The boy was silent, but not defiantly so. Gannett extemporized. "You notice, when you look, that spot on the edge which is shiny like mica?" The boy nodded. "I suspect the lens threads are producing some tiny flakes of rust. Try a little oil."

"My father," said the boy suddenly.

"Your father?"

"I'm looking for my father."

"He's in the house. I saw just now through the long glass, at the study window, typing." Immediately Gannett regretted this second disingenousness, because the boy obviously thought it shabby. "I'm sorry, David. I know that's not what you mean. What do you mean?"

"He's disappearing."

"Into his books?"

"No. It's my aunt, Abbey."

"She's making him disappear?"

"She's doing something to him. I'm positive."

"And you're spying to find out what it is?"

"Yes, then I can stop it."

Gannett shook his head. "That's a tough assignment, David.

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Even if you're right about your aunt, it may not be something you can see with a long glass."

"I don't believe in the invisible."

"You don't believe people can do invisible things to each other?"

"Oh yes, but it always starts visible, smiles or a look in the eye, before it turns into the invisible, like bone into cartilage."

Gannett admired that hard-headed precocity. "All right. What have you seen so far?"

Instead of answering, the boy handed Gannett the glass. Gannett focused again on the window. Stern's hunched concentration was unchanged, so Gannett ranged back and forth over the low hedgerow with the small field of the telescope, but he saw only faceless old stones and wide veins of mortar. These familiar textures, exposed mercilessly to the morning light, inclined him toward pity and arrested his search. But then Abbey Kristol appeared in the field of vision, strolling casually, reading a book, virtually naked in a white sunning brief. Her flesh was a resplendent bronze, her limbs and torso strong and perfectly formed, her hair brilliantly red. Had the bush of her pubes been exposed, it would have burned red, too, and ignited his desert heart. Desire, or the memory of desire, stirred in him, but only briefly. There was something else in that slowly moving body that was prodigiously more important than mere sex. What it was he would discover with later reflection. At the moment David was speaking. "It's not sex."

Gannett focused on Stern's face. The scholar followed Abbey's passing, but there was not in his eyes the faintest glimmer of lust. On the contrary, they showed a kind of dark and dolorous wonderment. Gannett handed the glass back. "I'm sure you're right about that, David."

"Do you know what it is?" The boy gave him a sharp look that mixed hope and skepticism.

"No. No, David."

"But you think you will know."

Gannett sighed. "You are asking me to enter with you into two rather strange stipulations, David—first, that your father is suffering from some malicious influence; secondly, that this influence emanates from your aunt, Abbey."

"That's just what I already know."

"You know it, but I don't know it. I would have to learn it for myself."

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"No," said the boy vehemently. In fact, he struck the stone with his fist. "Take my word for it. It was not until she moved in with us that my father started to disappear. And my mother is changed too. She was pretty and strong, but since Abbey came she's gotten tired."

She could never have been pretty, Gannett thought, but she obviously did have a considerable if crude strength. "What about you? What happened to you after Abbey came?"

For some moments the boy did not answer, but his eyes never flinched. "What happened to me is normal. I'm not worried about that. I'm worried about my father and mother."

This was remarkable. It made Gannett aware of just how far they had come in a few minutes. "Quite proper, David. I can see that you are a person of great character. On the other hand, you know nothing of me. You must decide whether you should have me for a confidant on such brief acquaintance."

"You or nobody," said the boy. "Besides: you see. I could've told if you didn't see."

"I will try to see, David. Let's part now and think about things for awhile, then meet again."

"All right."

Gannett stood and walked away, but the boy stayed at his station. From the last vantage at a turn in the path Gannett looked back to see him raise the long glass to his eye, turn the lens carefully, and resume his vigil.

Not until long after supper, when Haig's rattlings in the kitchen finally ceased, did Gannett allow his mind to return to David. The first thing that he remarked was the enormous courage and candor of the boy. How clearly he saw what it would mean to be entering adolescence in the same house with Abbey—the forbidden images, the sweaty auto-eroticism, and the little guilts clinging like leeches to his swelling manhood. In fact, one needed to consider whether it was this that transformed itself into irrational fear for the father's well-being. Gannett didn't think so. There was the clear ring of the boy's "it's not sex." Besides, there was Gannett's own observation, which supported the boy's, that Stern was not terribly substantial. He was intellectually substantial of course—Gannett had read the dossier that afternoon. But he had no presence. In the brief exchange at the garden gate Gannett had perceived that he floated precariously on his wife's solicitude, on the attentiveness, entirely mysterious then, of his son and his sister-in-law. Indeed he was, as

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David said, vulnerable to vanishment. The careful typing there at the study window prosing its deliberate way into the Kafkan arcanum was not proof against that.

Suddenly and surprisingly Gannett found himself more than mildly angry. His experience with the foundation, coalescing now with the character of Stern, discovered for him a whole sub-species of such men, a huge solipsistic biological backwash which in the conditions of nature would be happily doomed. In the society of men, however, these pale parasites with their great lobes and convolutions of useless learning were fed the affections of countless women and children. Incapable, or course, of making loving return to the human ground of their being, they leached their soil soullessly. Such a one was Stern most certainly, and Stedford House now the bleak terrarium of his rank bloom. The man sickened Gannett, and he could find no consolation in the fact that he was only a temporary and distant host, whereas Ruth and David must constantly give blood to Stern's necrotic stem. Presently, with the energy of anger, Gannett banished Stern from his mind, but not until he had the strong premonition that this pallorous creature would, before his departure, force him to some painful and perpetually regrettable decision.

Gannett turned his mind to Abbey, to the discovery he had promised himself of what it was that was not sex. But he discovered nothing, nothing at all, despite the fact that there by the rocks with David he had been perfectly sure he could uncover it at will. He was acutely irritated. No doubt the problem was that Stern had created in his mind an after image so inimical to Abbey's that they could not coexist in the same mental space. He tried reading, but the further accounts of coelacanths failed to provide the distraction which will sometimes surprise the unsuspecting conception that has eluded alertness. A generous brandy nightcap only fuzzed his brain. He prepared for bed.

It was after midnight that a vision of Abbey came, not to Gannett's dreams nor to his wakefulness. It was not a possession of his mind—he would always insist on that. It was a revelation in the form of her passing again, not necessarily below Stern's window, but simply passing, out there in the moonlight. Her appearance might have been shared by David or Haig or anyone. There was nothing proprietary in his seeing her. Her gait was what first struck him. You have seen herons, giraffes, stalking cats moving with such

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deliberate grace that it seems an exhibition of the anatomy of movement, the precise compaction of huge energies barely concealed. So Abbey's legs, even in her careless walk, suggested the capacity for incredible quickness. She was holding something before her, just as she had that morning. But it was not a book this time. What was it? Gannett thought it was something she would eat—not a slab of flesh merely, but some kind of dense and luminous aliment. It lighted her face. It commanded her rapt attention. But the legs continued autonomously that long rhythmic step. Suddenly Gannett had a wild intuition—Abbey came from a future where food was condensed and sacramental and where a richly elaborated biogram provided in the human body for new coordinations. It followed, then, that this gliding walk was only a fraction of an immense choreographic repertoire. Gannett's eye sought other newness in movement. But suddenly she was gone. He leaped out of bed and ran to his window, but he felt foolish before he reached it, because he knew that her passing was in a middle distance unrelated to the window's vantage or to the wall and the sea beyond.

The next day he met David against the rocks. "Anything unusual, David?"

"No. Did you see anything?"

"I saw Abbey walking last night." He watched David carefully, but the boy only shrugged. "So did I, but that's nothing new. She's walked every night since she came to our house."

"How long ago was that?"

"June."

"Where had she been before she came?"

"She was in college and then she was in Tibet, and India."

"Studying?"

The boy smiled wryly. "You should hear my mother on the subject of hippies in Asia. But now she thinks Abbey is gaining some stability—reading, eating regularly . . ." He stopped abruptly.

"But what?"

"That's not what she's doing."

"What's she doing?"

"She is trying out on my father the power she learned from gurus."

"But you don't know what the power is?"

The boy's dark eyes narrowed. "No. And I don't have much time to find out."

"You mean before your father disappears altogether?"

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"That won't happen. Because I'll stop her even if I don't know what she's doing."

"Be careful, David." Gannett paused to give his injunction weight, then he said, "You say you see her walk often at night. Does there seem to you anything peculiar about her walking?"

My mother says it's excess of youthful energy, but it's not. She paces like a wolf."

"Does she usually carry anything when she walks?"

"She eats. She says walking makes her ravenous, and she eats like crazy, anything in the house." At that moment the boy slapped the long glass in the palm of his hand, a sort of punctuation. "I've told you all I know, Mr. Gannett. What are you thinking? You must be thinking something, to ask all those questions."

"All right, David. I want to make a hypothesis. Then I want you to watch and think and tell me your conclusion in a day or so. Suppose your aunt is not actually doing anything. Suppose it's simply the power of her presence that is diminishing all of you. I'm sure it's not rare for a person to come into a situation and draw everything to herself so that the other persons no longer nourish each other as they are accustomed to. You don't need to posit some power derived from gurus. All you need to have is a very compelling person, a special kind of person who dominates everyone else's interest. You think about that."

The boy shook his head. "That's group psychology or something. This is freakier. It has to do with her night-walking and chants and exercises."

But Gannett did not take that up. He was firm. "You can't test a hypothesis, David, if you close your mind to it. Give it a fair trial. And remember, certain disturbances in groups *can* be very freaky, as you say. Historically they have produced witches and all manner of arcane phenomena."

That seemed to impress the boy. He nodded slowly. "OK, I'll give it a chance."

"Good."

Gannett considered when he returned to his house whether he should have been more candid with David. But he absolved himself. How could he tell the boy at this point that his father was an evolutionary dead end, that he was probably, even as they talked, playing his deadly end game with the mad Jew of Prague? And how could he convey his futuristic vision of Abbey? He was not yet prepared to try to explain to David Abbey's power, to try to

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supplant the boy's sexually suffused speculations about exotic transcendences and the other claptrap of youth cult. He had to work out the meaning of the vision more thoroughly for himself. He was confident he could. Then he would let it burst upon the boy with all the brilliance of the great priest's thought.

By supper time his confidence was so buoyant and his spirits so high that he could accept with unusual good humor Haig's inimitable mixture of indirection and crudeness.

"Well, sir," said the old Scot, "won't they send the boy on to school? Surely they won't leave him to gallivant on the property the year through."

"A note attached to Stern's dossier says that David is very advanced and is to be allowed a year of independent study."

"He needs a stick to his skittishness." The old man bore down with louring brows. Gannett drew back amused. "I didn't make the arrangement, Andrew. But I am in consultation with David about a matter which is the chief cause of what you call his skittishness. The problem concerns his aunt."

"The naked one?"

"Yes."

"I don't wonder."

Gannett decided not to attempt to refine the crude assumption which obviously lay behind Haig's remark. He was surprised when the old Scot himself carried the matter a step further. "And you, sir, are giving the lad counsel?" The wonderment was so wide-eyed that Gannett laughed almost boisterously. "Well, Andrew, I have after all passed the seven ages of man, including that one. And I do think that I can help the boy cut through some of the foggy romance of youth."

"Good for you, sir." That was sincere, if clipped. But Haig went on. "I wish it would take hold better, though. I still see him lurking about most darkly with that old long glass of your da's."

"True. But give me a bit more time. We've only had two short conferences."

Gannett went off to his study assured that this evening's self-communings would achieve what they had so miserably failed of the previous night. In fact, his confidence was so great that he knew he could start his meditation anywhere, because when a pattern of ideas and images begins to tessellate its mosaic, the tiniest piece placed correctly, by a kind of supra-aesthetic necessity, adumbrates all the rest. Mozart, of all men perhaps, had the keenest intuition of

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this. The great priest, his recent guest, knew it most cosmically. Begin, then, with the humble coelacanth, a living fossil. What he, John Magan Gannett, had experienced was, as it were, a living fossil of feeling. It was the remembered moment when man first saw in another, perhaps a woman, the promise of divinity. All is fire. Her flesh burns with a bronze fire. Her luxuriant hair in that primordial moment is a mantle of sun fire. Her eyes and her teeth are scintillant. Silex scintillans, says the old poet and mystic. But that was not all. Follow the pattern outward from the center of the mosaic, out to the most distant verge, where the eye strains to encompass the whole. Here is the same pattern only in a different figure. Here you do not begin with the coelacanth. You begin at time's other end, the dream of the fictionist of the future: the extraordinary creature whose being is so nearly pure energy that its flesh flows translucently in a sea of prismatic light. Is this not the same fierce fire arching across the eons? Yes. Our living fossil of feeling, that first clambering up from the dark sea into the sunlight of distant divinity, begets our prescience of the final fire, the bodiless light, alpha and omega rejoined.

Haig came with the snifter of warm brandy and left it at his master's elbow without speaking, sensing no doubt something of Gannett's transport. Gannett took up the glass with an almost ritual movement and for a moment held it high like a chalice. How immense was his gratitude at that moment. With what an utterly unique concatenation he had been gifted: the visit of the great priest as a kind of novitiate, the keen pubescent boy, and the woman of extraordinary beauty—all conspiring to bestow on him the moment in which evolution and devolution folded upon each other in the rosy fire of the ultimate mosaic. He drank. His eyes moistened. And some minutes later he descended into the kind of sleep which he had always imagined the great priest knew—a darkness so perfectly void that one seems to hear the first warm procreative suspiration of God. And each morning's awakening is like the first awakening.

2

When Gannett awoke to that rare dawning, the most significant perhaps of his life, he lay for a long while in the afterglow of his great vision. If he never saw further, and probably he would not, he

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knew enough now to give him an equanimous proof against the pangs of his own mortality. Death had not yet mounted to his casement. There in the offing, though, just beyond the morning mists of the bay, he rowed a black bier over smooth water trailing a garland of lilies. Gannett knew that, though younger, he would precede Andrew because the old Scot, he fancied, had the strengths of both ancient branches—chordate and arthropod, backbone and shell. What an angry snap would signal the parting of that life. But none of this troubled him. In fact, the warmth of his body, though he knew it was fading inchmeal down the evening of his life, was sufficient presentiment of the eternal fire he would join.

Thus Gannett might have whiled away the whole mild morning under his eiderdown, feeling not the slightest pang of hunger or any other lack. Andrew had given up on him, left something in the warmer, and gone out to the garden. Was it time already to mulch the roses? He heard the blade of the hoe strike the soil in a slow but powerful measure. But it was not the disapprobation in the old puritan's stirrings that finally roused him from his sublime torpor. It was the thought of David. It ran through him like a sudden chill. How on earth could he hope to convey to the boy the meaning of Abbey, knowledge that, for all he knew, required sixty years' cooling of the blood and the deep study of a great mentor. How could he tell him that his aunt, against whom all his being was set, was the way of life; that the father could not ultimately be saved from the trammels of his own deadly devotion to the mad Jew of Prague, who hungered for but never tasted his awful God? Yet tell something he must, because the boy's agitation inclined him already toward dangerous acts.

Gannett arose, dressed quickly, and hurried out to the rocks without eating. David was not there, though it was only a few minutes later than the time of their previous rendezvous. Gannett waited with mixed feelings—on the one hand reluctance to undertake the extraordinarily difficult explanations, on the other an anxiousness to have the job done so that he could bask freely in the last of the September sun and in the naked heat of Abbey's beauty. But the bright rocks spread upon his agitation such a warm mollification that he drifted in his waiting toward drowsiness. When a few moments later a noise commenced, he thought, with a twinge of guilt, that it was the buzzing of his own idle head. That turned out not to be true. It was a human humming all right, but it was not

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merely mental. It filled the space between the rocks and Stedford House. Gannett stood up and looked across that space. A head was visible at the study window, Stern. Another head showed below the window and just above the hedge, brazen in the sun, Abbey. And the voice certainly was Abbey's, in an endless chant without need of respiration, the Hindu AUM perhaps, or something even less formulated. Gannett walked cautiously closer, keeping a veil of bush and bramble between himself and the house, following more with ear than eye—not the song of the sirens or the lotus-eaters, but the song the maiden sings at the world's center, the omphalos. It is not the song of the singer, it is the song of the place. All sounds are gathered into the one rotundity, AAHM. All songs are the same song.

Gannett mounted a bushy hillock near the hedge. From this vantage Abbey was wholly visible. She was leaning back on both hands, facing the sun blindly, making her chant in two distinct pulses, inhalation and exhalation. When she sang in, her stomach swelled toward a promise of immense fecundity and her legs pressed sensuously into the grass. When she sang out, her stomach retracted into a concavity so deep that it seemed to recede even to the spine, and her legs withered. Watching this remarkable systole and diastole, Gannett felt the pulses of the song now fill him, now draw everything out of him. His own breathing conformed to the long measure. The wind of his lungs and the salt tide of his blood ebbed and flowed with the song. He almost fell into a trance. But at a certain moment he raised his eyes lazily to Stern's face. Here was a shocking image of inner strife. The face begged to be loosed to follow the delicious song, but the cruel knots of its own self-discipline held tight. The intensity of the conflict jolted Gannett out of the hypnotic rhythm of the song so that something above caught his alerted eye. He looked up to see David crouching in the shadow of the chimney. His eyes, like a hawk's, burned amber in that midday dark. And like a hawk, too, he seemed to ruffle his wings tentatively and rise on his feet as though to test the wind. And constantly the fierce avidity of eye flinted brightly against the dark stone. Gannett half expected the young hawk to stoop, bury beak and claw in that bronze flesh, and fill the wind with the bloody scream that would revive the father. This tableau momentarily froze Gannett's stare—the unpenetrated mystery of the song of the center, the king dying of a bloodless heart, and the prince in the

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imagination of vengeance caressing the wind, already airborne.

Then with a careless slam Ruth emerged from the kitchen door. She descended the steps from the stoop with an awkward angry bustle. "Abbey, for the love of God, who can write with the Taj Mahal echoing in their ear? Shut it off." The girl rolled her head slowly forward without opening her eyes until it almost touched her knees. And there was another tableau for Ganett to store in his mind's eye: the fat goddess of the hearth standing arms akimbo above the offending maid whose fiery hair was just now beginning to fall forward coil by coil like stricken serpents. But still the king's crossed face was an emblem of agony in the uncurtained window and still the fire in the prince's eye fed on the prospect of murderous saving.

Presently the boy crawled back up over the ridge of the roof, rising for a brief moment against the incongruous blue benignity of the sky. Gannett avoided the rendezvous at the rocks and took the sinuous path out along the wall at the edge of the cliff. Below him the bay reflected the placidity of the sky. For this he was grateful, because his great vision of the night before was badly jostled. The central image and significance of Abbey was not disturbed. No, if anything, her marvelous flexing chant had strengthened that. It was the vortex of destructive emotions swirling around her that had shaken him—repulsion, fear, hatred. So he was in no mood to talk to David. But as it turned out he was forced to. The boy intercepted him just as he was turning up from the wall. Here a stand of low dry pines, trained by the frequent wind off the bay, leaned hungrily toward the garden. Gannett led the boy a few steps farther, forestalling conversation until he was seated on a rustic bench in the shade. His failure to eat breakfast coupled with the emotions of the last hours had left him weak. David sat on the grass at his feet. "I saw you watching. You still think Abbey is just a special kind of person who's not really doing anything?"

Gannett shook his head slowly, searching his mind for the right image and idiom to convey his complex intuition to the boy. "No, David, the proposition I left with you yesterday did not go nearly far enough. Abbey is not just a special kind of person. She is a messenger of time." That interested the boy, but he was on guard. He cocked his eye skeptically. "Do messengers of time always destroy people?"

"As in the case of your father, you mean?"

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"Right. And maybe my mother, too, if it goes on much longer, which it won't."

"Just for a few moments let's put aside the effect Abbey may have on any given person and concentrate on what she represents. All right?"

David nodded. "OK. She's a messenger of time. What's the message?"

"Two messages, one from the past and one from the future, but both mean the same thing."

"Go ahead."

Gannett leaned back and shut his eyes. When at length he spoke, it was very slowly, in a tone almost incantatory. "Message number one, from the past. A great forest of the early Pleistocene. A lake. I, a little hominid, a little would-be man, saw rise from the water the dawn woman with hair of fire. She flew into the sky and left me behind with seared eyes. I and my kind will lapse on this shore, but when you discover my bones they will all be pointing like little arrows in the direction of her flight." Gannett stopped, but he did not open his eyes. David did not speak. All that could be heard was the light brushing of the wind among the pines.

"Message number two, from the future. A dark sky swirling with bright stars. I, a man of luminous flesh, am a galactic sentinel. I circle the lake of fire. A star crossed my last round, a rare and radiant being that pulled me into the wake of her red hair. But I could not follow her though the speed of my desire contracted my bones into little nodes of quivering song. Still, I do not sorrow greatly. My galaxy whirls closer upon itself and others upon it. We will all meet at the center." A few moments later Gannett, still without moving and without opening his eyes, said, "I'm sorry, David. It's not very good, but it's the best I can do." David did not speak, but presently Gannett heard a soft rusting. He sat forward and opened his eyes. The boy, with what seemed a kind of sorrowful reluctance, was unfolding a crumpled sheet of paper. He handed it up to Gannett, who read silently.

> Each morning the man wakes up at a different window and leans on the ledge angrily. He does not acknowledge the constant sweeping which scratches along the floor outside the door of his room. One day a woman passes under the window. "Say," he demands, "who is changing the grass and the sky every day?" But the woman, despite her proximity and his reiterations, does not appear to hear him. She seems

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to be practicing a theatrical walk with exaggerated insouciance. All her mind is in the balls of her feet, her hips, and her shoulders. The man lifts himself over the window ledge, hangs for a moment by his fingers, and drops.

"Your father wrote this?"

David nodded.

"It's an excellent imitation of Kafka."

"I think it's a suicide note."

Gannett sighed. "All imitations of Kafka are suicide notes if you ask me, David."

"I can't read those books."

"Neither can I."

"All right," the boy said abruptly, "if Abbey brings messages about the great destiny of man, why does it kill my father?"

"Light to eyes which have long been in darkness is blinding."

David stood up. "My father is a well-known scholar with a brilliant career. Abbey is a crackpot hippie."

Gannett sighed and nodded slowly. "Your father is absolutely brilliant, David. I've read his books," he lied. "But you know, I've never had a chance to talk to Abbey at all. Do you suppose she would be willing to talk to me?"

"She would be willing to do any crazy thing. But it won't do any good. She always talks in stupid riddles—no messages from the past or the future."

Gannett shrugged. "Then maybe I will change my mind about her."

"When do you want to talk to her?"

"I'll be at the rocks around this time tomorrow. If that's not satisfactory, she can send you with other directions."

"OK."

"David, before you leave, tell me, have you lost faith in me altogether?"

The boy shook his head. "She might be a messenger, Mr. Gannett, but I think she's a phoney." He hesitated. Gannett helped him. "But if she's only a phoney, your father would see through her and remain unaffected. Is that it?"

David nodded. Gannett stood up and put his hand lightly on the boy's shoulder. "We'll work this out, David, you and I. But in the meantime you must only watch. Do nothing drastic. Is that a promise?"

"For a couple of days, Mr. Gannett."

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"A bit longer perhaps."

The boy shook his head.

"All right then, a couple of days will have to do."

Gannett had not set his rendezvous with Abbey earlier because he needed the evening in his study to prepare for it. Even so, it was several hours after supper and several sips into his second brandy before he had worked out steps which seemed to have some likelihood of success. The problem, of course, was to authenticate for the Sterns the message which Abbey bore so that they could acknowledge it, let them value it as they would. Knowledge would at least diminish the disturbance. Here was the plan that Gannett devised. At his meeting with Abbey the next day he would advise her of present dangers and press the point that she must make her representations to the family less exotic, more understandable. To this end he would help her, first by attempting again to enlist the confidence of David, secondly by arranging a family dinner at his home. The dinner would provide an opportunity for the four of them, on neutral ground and under the kindly auspices of a reverend and perceptive benefactor, to harmonize their differences. Gannett believed that if he once got them under his roof he could embrace all in at least a loose alliance. For surely David, once freed of fears for his father, could reach a tolerant understanding of Abbey. And hadn't the father's face, almost rapt by Abbey's song, revealed an intuition that might eventually light his way out of the Kafkan obscurity? And even the mother, hadn't she conjured within her obtuse corpulence, the surprisingly appropriate image of the Taj Mahal? Yes. Gannett's hopeful heart sprang up. There are none, even among those evolution seems to have discarded, who cannot get a glimpse of Abbey's portentous brilliance.

Gannett set aside his brandy and shortly sank into the great priest's profound and imageless sleep where just at the verge of the total eclipse of consciousness one hears the rising suspiration of the Fecundator. He lay in that blackness until well after midnight. Then his sleep was disturbed by the same images of primeval forest which he had dreamed shortly after the priest's departure. But this time, his dreaming mind knew, the issue would be vastly accelerated and it would be something far different from that earlier teeming phylum of minatory marsupials which had sent him in flight to London. This time there was less of the ambiance of steamy abundant life and more a feeling of precision. He felt almost as though he might reach out and pluck the air and thus bring

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about instantly the crystallization of a form which waited for its moment in the luminous jungle atmosphere. But there was yet a period of tense musical silence before the fronds at last parted and she stepped forth—not in newborn wonderment into a green world but purposefully, making her way across a middle distance of indefinite undergrowth to his side. He accepted her. The silence was broken by the gasp of his own passion. He awoke.

Almost immediately he leaped out of bed, took off his pajamas, wiped himself briskly with them. The harshly infolded silk shot blue scintillances into the crisp autumn air. He then made his way through the dark without misstep to the dining room, where a fire was laid ready against the morning chill. He threw the pajamas on the logs and lit the fire. Precisely arranged by Haig, kindling and logs flared brightly. Gannett watched the flames rise up to the silk. At first they only scorched it, highlighting briefly by some curious process the tiny weave of the fabric. Then the flames burst out. The silk twisted upon itself, making an image of human agony and turning up to Gannett's eyes his embroidered initials, J. M. G.

"Master?"

Gannett turned. There was Haig loosely robed and wide-eyed in the fire light. Gannett's mind was not so inflamed that he could not imagine the impression he made naked against the fire, an incongruity perhaps unbearable to the eye—the poor forked creature on the last verge of his mortality set against the perpetual fire, as La Tour makes the candle flame show mercilessly the hint of green in the dead god's flesh.

"Go to bed, Andrew. I'm all right." But the old man did not move. "I only had a very bad dream, Andrew, which frightened me into a kind of fit, but I'm all right now. Go to bed."

"It's them." Haig flicked his head with surprising alacrity. "And the witch amongst them."

For a moment Gannett wondered if perhaps the old Scot's sleep had been disturbed, too, but he dismissed the idea. "Andrew, I have asked you twice now to leave me. You will do that "

"Shall I get you some fresh night clothes, sir?"

"No. Are you taking pleasure in my embarrassment?"

"You can't believe it, sir."

"Then leave me."

At that the old man did finally turn and retreat with heavy step. Gannett remained a moment longer, but he was deeply chilled. The fire seemed all light and no heat.

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At the rocks the following morning David reported that Abbey would meet Gannett that night when she began her usual walk at ten o'clock. She preferred to talk to him at night. The delay was frustrating and unfruitful for Gannett. He had already decided his course in the early hours of the morning, as he lay naked in his bed watching the first light of the sun slowly gray the black of the ceiling. He saw how foolish was his dream of harmonizing the Sterns to Abbey Kristol. They were no more ready for her than Haig was. The intuitions which he had imagined them capable of were only the fair seemings of fond hope. For the father responded to Abbey against his will and, knowing only the God of the dark pages, could never follow. And the mother could hear only the rebellious chant of non-conformity, never the divine harmony within. And the boy? Perhaps someday, when free of the toils of flesh. Which reminded him painfully that he was not ready himself, proven unworthy by his dreams. So perhaps the only one was the great priest who could lie looking at the black ceiling until he fell into pure and dreamless sleep. Or was his sleep, too, vulnerable to wicked visitations? No, it was not. Gannett believed that. If the word was to be made flesh, however little the world cared to acknowledge it, there must be one, at least one who understood. But Abbey must go. That was the true wisdom which his cowardice and his corruption bestowed. To protect Stern and Ruth, to protect Abbey herself from David, and, yes, to protect his own old man's sanity and celibacy, she must go. A thousand regrets, a universe of regrets, but she must go.

So, later, in the early dark of the evening he waited without trepidation. His purpose was fixed.

"Mr. Gannett?"

"Yes. I'm here."

She wore a white dress with shoulder straps that set off in the moonlight the deep bronze of her arms and neck. She came to him with a smile that revealed her large white teeth. And she brought a distinct aura—soft warmth and the mild perfume of washed flesh. Gannett had wondered, after his dream, about the effect of her near presence. Everything stirred in him as before, but only as a distant echo. He was safe on that score. Thank age for relegating its madness to dreams.

"Thank you for coming."

"I am only passing, Mr. Gannett, on my way to the wall by the cliff."

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"Won't you stop here for a moment?"

"No, but I will stop at the wall."

"What's the distinction?"

"I know that you are going to say something very blue, Mr. Gannett, and I want to be where I can see the moon on the bay."

So Gannett followed her around the garden and down through the sloping pines to the wall. There she sat almost primly with her legs crossed and her dress pulled modestly over the knees. Gannett stood safely behind the wall. She laughed. It was a marvelous musical laugh. "Oh Mr. Gannett, did you think I was the demon who would cast you over the cliff onto the rocks below?"

"Yes, Miss Kristol, and then you would unfold your hidden wings and fly down to feast on my broken flesh."

She laughed again. "Oh my! Well, the truth is I'm afraid of *you*, Mr. Gannett."

"Why?"

"Because you're so rich. The rich always get what they want. I know I will have to do whatever you say."

"You surprise me, Miss Kristol."

"Why? Because David told you I was a hippie and you thought I would talk strangely?"

"Partly that." She did not inquire about the other parts, so Gannett took up another line. "Tell me, Miss Kristol, what you learned in India and Tibet."

"Devolution."

"Devolution?"

"Yes, devolution. I learned the way of the animals."

"I'm not sure I know what you mean."

"I mean, Mr. Gannett, I met a wise man who taught me how to be an animal."

"Is this a yoga exercise or something of the sort?"

"No. My teacher had his own unique system. But don't think he was one of those cynical gurus who sets up for profit. He was very learned. During the day he was a librarian in Bragat."

"In the evening he taught devolution?"

"Yes. He said that only two Americans, both writers, had ever understood the necessity of the return."

"Who were these?" Gannett never got an answer to that question, for just then Abbey Kristol began to howl like a wolf. It startled Gannett badly, but only for a moment. When he had

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recovered himself and was able to listen attentively, he found the long lugubrious baying quite remarkable and indeed so convincing that he fancied the warm sea shining below them in the moonlight was a frozen expanse of the arctic north. Then periodically came a high rapid barking, no doubt some important communication in what the great priest had described as the intensely social and monogamous milieu of the wolf. The cry went on for some time. She seemed altogether caught up in it. Gannett watched her bosom expand and contract, her neck quiver, and her lips curl back to expose bright teeth. Presently the crying began to fade brokenly as though her wolf were running away now into a dense forest. So delicate was the ending that even the silence of the bay seemed to return to them cautiously.

"Beautiful," Gannett said.

"Then you don't think it's crazy?"

"Not in the least."

"I have been the whole wolf, Mr. Gannett."

"I was sure you had, Miss Kristol, or you never could have made that cry."

"And now you want me to go away."

"Yes. You understand that, don't you?"

"But poor Peter needs me, Mr. Gannett."

"He needs you, but he cannot receive you at this time."

"Are you going to talk bourgeois morality, Mr. Gannett?"

"I certainly hope not, Miss Kristol. The point I make is that far from helping the man, you are destroying him—and not because of ethical conflicts but because of much deeper ones."

"I know the darkness that Peter is in with those mad books, Mr. Gannett, and Ruth's common sense can't help him out."

"But neither can your crying and your chanting and your beauty, Miss Kristol. They will only drive him to further despair, and young David will come down on you like a hawk."

She nodded slowly. "Yes, you're right."

"And you are not altogether wrong, Miss Kristol. But you have seen much further than Peter and so he is not ready for you. And David is too young and Ruth is of a very different cast of mind. So you must leave them."

"Where will I go, Mr. Gannett? Is one of the beneficiaries of your foundation studying lycanthropy?"

"Don't be cynical, Miss Kristol. I don't know much about things

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out there. The world has gotten beyond me, but I have the distinct impression that it is much wider and more tolerant than it was when I was your age."

"Oh tolerant, yes, Mr. Gannett. I can find plenty who will tolerate a person who bays at the moon, but can I find someone who will go any further than tolerance?"

"Someone, if you search relentlessly, who will go a great deal further."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because I myself would have, Miss Kristol, if I were younger."

She looked down at him intently. "I believe you would, Mr. Gannett."

"It's one of the questionable privileges of age, Miss Kristol, to pass pleasantries which need never be followed by deeds. You honor me by seeing that I was serious. Another questionable prerogative of age is the making of valedictions. Will you take one of mine seriously?"

"I will."

"This is purely speculative, Miss Kristol, so please do not be offended. You say you have learned devolution. And indeed you have, marvelously well. You can visit your deepest roots. Maybe this was the task of your generation. I admire your courage. But have you learned evolution? Your generation seems to want to protract its innocence indefinitely, as though it thought it was perpetually in the garden. You might consider that."

"Do you think it's harder to be a woman than a wolf, Mr. Gannett?"

"Perhaps. And certainly harder to be what comes after woman."

Abbey Kristol's eyes shone down at him with a special intensity. "What comes after woman, Mr. Gannett?"

Gannett threw up his hands. "The wisdom is in the asking." Then he drew back a step from the wall. "Now I must be going, Miss Kristol. I am very weary. You have disturbed my old age mightily and I can't thank you enough for it."

She looked back at him, but almost distractedly, her eyes inward. "I think I'll stay a while longer."

"All right. But before I go, may I know your resolve?"

"You think I need to leave immediately?"

"For the sake of the others, instantly, I'm afraid."

"Then I'll go tomorrow."

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"Do you need any funds, Miss Kristol?"

"No, Mr. Gannett."

"Good-bye, Miss Kristol."

"Good-bye, Mr. Gannett. Thanks for your lovely wall."

"Good-bye."

In the parlor Haig was robed and fretting fiercely. "Where have you been, sir? I thought I heard a wolf."

"You did, Andrew, but it was a she-wolf that is now domesticated and harmless."

"Have the Sterns brought a wolf, sir?"

"They are losing her tomorrow. Do you follow my meaning, Andrew?"

"Do you mean, sir, she made that howling?"

"Yes, but she's leaving tomorrow, I told you. There is nothing more to fear."

"Thank God."

Gannett tumbled into bed totally enervated. At the last moment all of his energies failed. He could not even finish his brandy. At the verge of the great priest's profound darkness he heard the call of the wolf, but he could not tell from which side.

3

Three days later Gannett and David sat in the sun on the rocks. Each seemed lost in thoughts which, judging from their faces, were mildly sad. Gannett was the first to speak. "Now that I don't have anything to worry about, David, I hardly know what to do with myself."

"I didn't think you were ever that worried."

"Oh yes. The worst time was the morning Abbey left. I woke up thinking that she had thrown herself over the cliff. I had told her she must depart instantly and she had jumped. It was a foolish fear, but I was sure of it. That's why I rushed over to Stedford House in such a sweat and was so relieved to learn that your mother had driven her to the station."

David shrugged. "It would have been better for her to jump than to stay here."

"Well . . ." Gannett did not make his disagreement any plainer. "Then I began to worry about your father. I feared that she had left too late after all."

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"I knew he would be OK."

The two of them simultaneously turned to the window where Stern's head could be seen above the hedge. The distant tapping and tinkling of the typewriter was almost merry. Presently Ruth came into the yard and draped some damp linen over the lawn chairs. Stern looked up briefly, frowned, and then resumed his tapping away at K's arbitrary God.

"So what shall I worry about now, David? Shall I worry about you?"

"No, don't worry about me, Mr. Gannett."

"All right, then I'll worry about myself, David."

The boy looked up quickly. "Why?"

"I'll worry about why I couldn't explain to you and arrange things so that we could have Abbey with us."

David shook his head. "Nobody could've done that, Mr. Gannett. She had to go."

Gannett shook his head in firm disagreement. "I know a man who could."

"Who?"

"A man who once stayed in Stedford House, like your father, a very holy man whose flesh is translucent and whose bones are tunnels of light. He is probably the only man alive who could teach us how not to tangle Abbey in our desires."

The translucent flesh and the bones of light started David shaking his head gently even before Gannett finished. "I never know whether you're talking about anything real or not, Mr. Gannett. But you *do* the right thing. You helped me save my father. That's all I care about."

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RORY HOLSCHER

The Salmon Run at Michigan City, Indiana, Fall 75

(The Department of Natural Resources began stocking Indiana waters during the mid-sixties. Now thousands of fish are taken during each spawning run. The rate of natural reproduction is listed officially as zero.)

I

I'm honestly glad that it's done
for this year: the salmon going black
with arctic night along their flanks,
stacking up in the harbors, then
thrashing & hurtling up the tiny steams
(Trail Cr., Salt Cr., the Little Calumet).
The chinook first, a yard long or bigger,
their tail fins spread like pairs of dark wings;
they lift my dreams onto their backs as they pass.
The coho come next, smaller, jaws hooked—
their heads are styled like a Chilkat mask.
Black with a rose alpenglow on their bellies,
they run until the first November snow.
Though I live entranced by the nearness of
big fish, I'm glad the run is done for this year.
We sat near the deadfalls, our lines set to snare.
The talk was easy & always the same. Where are they
running, Krueger Park or the highway? Whose
inlaws went home with a trunk full of fish?
I sat by a man who fished all of every night
after a 3-10 shift at the Midland Steel mill.
He sat on a cutbank; his eyes followed the water.
"I'll be here," he said, "till the last one
is gone." At the peak of the run, the moon
came full & hung like a lamp in the bare maple trees.
Fishing alone, I'd hear a salmon jump
& think for a moment that the Sasquatch could
be real, prowling the big salmon rivers
of the West, hairy & wailing, smelling ranker
than a bear—somebody who's quit his
lousy job forever & gone back to the earliest
thoughts in his brain. One night I drove up
the Little Calumet, to a bridge just below
the state prison farm. 3 cops were standing

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in the glazed light of their lantern,
big arms flexed to unload their strength
through the pitchforks in their hands.
I've thought since of the Yurok tribe
who once fished the Klamath River. It's said
that when the runs slacked off, men would scream
"I see a salmon!" as they pointed in a frenzy to
imaginary fish, thinking that this would make
real salmon appear. Hungry, they believed that visions
would help make their stomachs full. Now there is
the steel mill & a frenzy for living flesh.

2

Mike Elgin works for the DNR; one night
I rode with him when he checked the streams
at midnight. He said, "I worked
in the foundry before I got this job.
I couldn't go back now, no matter what
they paid. In Mike's brain, there is a map
of every bridge in Porter County. He showed me
18 roads that cross the Little Calumet.
Mike weighs 200 lbs & they used to call him
"Earthquake." He shook his head. "I don't
like fighting any more than pouring steel."
He has a habit of crouching beside every
netted salmon, his fingers probing softly
to see if the eggs are gone. He said, "Most
of their eggs don't survive in this water.
There's too much silt & garbage & the rivers
run too slow. Last March I walked Trail Cr.
from the basin out to Springville. That was
24 miles of stream bed. It took me 3 days.
I checked every pool for salmon fry
& the whole way, there was nothing.
But in wooded lot near Springville,
I found a tiny gravel pool. (Gravel cleans
the water so the salmon eggs can breathe.)
I found a couple coho fry & with them
3 chinooks." He shook his head. "The creek
there's just a trickle. I don't know how
the fish got through. Maybe they swam
a flashflood, right after a storm."

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Here between the steel mills & the interstate
highways, by chance & will, a few lives
make their way into the clear.

BREWSTER GHISELIN

On the Road to Durango

Amid the remissions of cliff
On the wall of the west
That rises and falls from Durango,
Peach trees are blossoming
In dooryards paltry and short
Crowding the curve of the highway,
And down from a few mud huts
Wrapped in their woodsmoke
And tunes of their cities,
Under the fine first bloom
Of peaches a year will shape
Children come forward
Turning their faces outward and up
Like blind bright flowers,
Not to the light of silence
Over the twelvefold mountain
That hides the plains and the sea
But to measure a pageant of motors
Breathing power
Supreme in a music
Lifting and quickening
Under breastbones vibrant to violence
Battering vast
Crescendo in its passage,
Calling in its coming and crying
In a slow far rising away,
The startle and falter of the trucks
Grinding their climb
To the place of the old high palace
On the hump of the world
Where the footing under heaven is slipperiest
And the winds are at work.

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BARRY SPACKS

Valentine

I usually give you a little poem
and a great big box of chocolates, or
more of a poem and less of a box,
and who can say which we'll have except
the chances for chocolate grow smaller word
for word—if this keep going on
we're down to six fruits-and-nuts no look
three caramels one angelcream watch out
a last Jordan almond we'd better bite it in
whoops it's gone there's nothing left
but you, and me, and a yen, I tell you,
heavy for sweets . . . now what should we do
about that?

Woman in the Subway

Once in the subway a downcast woman
moved along the platform saying
"Talk to me? Talk to me?" No one replied.
Refusal—tight-lipped turning away—
seemed the world's oldest profession, so when she
reached me I spoke. "What?" I said,
and at once she lifted the word to her mouth
like a frog from the swamp: "Ra-*whaaat*?" she mocked,
turning in circles, blaring, as if
she'd won, she'd made someone speak, a fellow
human. "Ra-*whaaat*? Ra-*whaaat*?"

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JOHN BALABAN

Doing Good

PERHAPS THE CRUELEST THING the North Vietnamese did to Americans, which we will hold against them even more bitterly than our defeat, is their failure, after their victory, to bathe South Vietnam in blood. We needed a bloodbath, for even though we had lost the war, we could say that we had tried to save our half of the country from barbarous slaughter. Now it is harder to excuse the horrible things which we did in Vietnam.

If we sanctioned evil acts because they seemed to serve a greater good, perhaps we ought to forget them. The war is over. We could forget them if only we weren't so capable of performing them again, for even at the close of the war, with still another President making the decisions, we confused doing good with our own vague self-interest and the result once again was further suffering for others and increased moral confusion for ourselves. When defeat was clear, we baby-lifted hundreds of infants to save them from communist barbarism. Children who were left temporarily in orphanages were packed off to the United States. Brothers and sisters were separated and sent to unaware families thousands of miles apart. We never asked ourselves how these Asian, Eurasian and black Asian children would fare as adolescents and adults. We needed them immediately, like extras in a movie. Two scenes from our last venture at doing good in Vietnam are memorable: President Ford cradling an infant at the door of an Air Force plane (which had flown into Vietnam with arms and had flown out with babies) and an Air Force medic "giving an orphan its first drink in the U.S." (by squirting a hypodermic of Coca-Cola into its open mouth). We jammed the telephone lines with our requests for these children; when the adults came, we didn't like it.

Vietnam confused us. Most of us meant well. I am still sorting out my own involvement which began one warm afternoon in the spring of 1967 when I returned to my apartment from Widener library and encountered circumstances which more or less urged me to go: Plodding along with bookbag weighted with Middle

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Scots and Old English texts—the focus of my attention during my first year of graduate study at Harvard—with eyes itchy in the sunlight and shoulders stooped from reading too much, I came across a large crowd outside of Lowell House. They were students mostly and they were waiting to speak to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who was talking to a small group of undergraduates while in Cambridge as a guest of the new Kennedy Institute. At that time, you remember, the Johnson Administration still got away with saying very little about the war. On this occasion, McNamara had been petitioned to speak to the academic community, which in Boston, with its several hundred colleges and junior colleges, is quite large. To make his position easier, some of his fellow guests at the Institute offered to share a platform with him. He refused. When I got to Lowell House perhaps five hundred persons were milling about. An SDS fellow was haranguing the crowd with a bull horn, but generally it was pleasant and amiable. Far down Mt. Auburn Street a bedsheet with an unintelligible protest was hung from a third-story window. The tune and some of the words of "Mack the Knife" floated towards the crowd.

When McNamara did emerge, it was from a side exit into a narrow street to which the crowd rushed and, perhaps unintentionally, blocked his car. The Secret Service looked menaced and started pushing people out of the way. I stood behind an ABC camera team where it seemed safe and looked at the Secretary as he sat in his car. After a few minutes he got out and got up on the roof of his car, buckling the roof with a crackle which he ignored. The crowd hushed. He said, "I'll give you four minutes, then I must leave." He began, "When I was a student in California, I was as radical as you." The crowd groaned. "But there was one difference . . . I was more polite." The crowd booed. Someone yelled, "Fuck you!" Another yelled, "Murderer!" The cameras whirred. The sound man winked triumphantly at the camera man. McNamara was helped down by an agent and was driven off. Harvard apologized publicly.

And so I can thank Harvard and McNamara for my going to Vietnam, for both in their contrary ways had aroused in me an interest in *veritas*. During the following week, filled with decision, I wrote a poem about my going which was printed in the *American Scholar,* renewed an application that I had made more than a year earlier with the International Voluntary Services, and, even more to

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the point, I began dickering with my Pennsylvania draft board about trading in my student deferment for a conscientious objector rating on terms that would allow me to work in Vietnam as a civilian and without supervision.

My draft board, a group of old men who seemed frightened that I might make a speech, hearing that I was dropping my student deferment to perform good works in Vietnam, made me a conscientious objector in a four-minute hearing taken up mostly by my stating my name, by my swearing on the Bible, and by my answering "yes" when asked if I really intended to go to Vietnam. My hearing was so short that I thought they had turned me down out of hand. I had constructed answers regarding the sanctity of all life above the bird level (I still fished, and hunted grouse), and I was ready to reply that the Supreme Being was a kind of gas permeating the universe with goodliness and creation, but they did not ask one question.

In July, 1967, I arrived in Vietnam. In a few months, I was to teach at the University of Can Tho in the Mekong Delta as a volunteer with the International Voluntary Services, a kind of peace corps hired by the U.S. Agency for International Development to teach English, hand out seeds, and to relocate refugees. On the ride into Saigon from Tan Son Nhut airport, my white suit, which clothed slim confidence, was grimed with crankcase oil from the floor bed of the truck that ferried sixty of us new volunteers to a suffocating dormitory on the outskirts of town where idle small arms fire riddled one's sleep from dusk to dawn. My comrades were very keen on helping Vietnamese and seemed to suffer from none of the ambiguities that were aroused in me at the sight of all those ammo dumps and fighter-bombers at the airport; my comrades were missionaries and they found *virtus,* if not *veritas,* in wretched food, stopped toilets, and sleepless nights. After some weeks of delay in Saigon, during which I tried to learn Vietnamese (my first words were "no" and "boiled water, please"), I flew to the center of the Delta where I taught descriptive linguistics. Soon I had my doubts that I was doing anybody any good, except by helping to keep a few Vietnamese draft dodgers in class and off the battlefields. And there was the worry that I was taking a job away from a Vietnamese instructor and putting him on the battlefield. And who could I help by deceiving these young people into believing that Americans could be as nice as I? Didn't I owe it to them to come to

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class drunk, loud, and lecherous? I only worried about these things for a few months. In February, the 1968 Tet Offensive began and the University and my house beside it were bombed by Americans and South Vietnamese.

This gave me a chance to do some *immediate* good which, of course, is the best kind because it comes without hesitation, is perfectly human to perform, and is immediately rewarding both to the receiver and to the giver. At the beginning of the Offensive, while there was fighting in the streets, and planes and Cobra helicopters were strafing overhead, I volunteered with three other young Americans to work in the general hospital. In the central courtyard of the hospital, whole families, shredded up and bleeding, lay moaning in the dirt or on reed mats under the broiling sun. My next door neighbor, raving himself, attended his delirious wife whose head was filled with slivers of shrapnel from a mortar that strayed into our door-yard as she peeked out during a lull. A teenage girl, still in the light cotton pajamas that Vietnamese wear around the house, had thrown her body over her old father because he was cold, because he was dying. A little boy thrashed about and would not be consoled by some adults because his ear drums were blown out and he could only hear pain. There were hundreds of such people. There were no doctors. In the U.S. I had talked about the war; marched against the war; I had lived in Vietnam eight months, and up until that moment I knew nothing about the war.

As the four of us stepped by the bodies and into the corridor leading to the surgery room, we met six or so heavily-armed American officers. They were military doctors, and with the fighting close by and the Vietnamese staff having already left, they were leaving too. They agreed to stay and operate if we would agree to serve as nurses and guards. So for a week, I gave blood (one unit), carried bodies, living and dead, learned how to clean and dress wounds, charged myself with closing the eyes of the dead (discharging myself from this duty when a number of stiffened eyelids refused to shut), and guarded the operating room as bullets made a sieve of the water tower near which I sat with a Red Cross band on my arm and a submachine gun in my hands. Without a guard, the surgeons wouldn't operate. If the surgeons didn't operate, many would die. Without medical stores, Vietcong soldiers would die too. To my shame and growing confusion (I had wanted to help *save* lives but I wanted the Vietcong to win) I was proposing to try to kill any that

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might get over the eight-foot stucco wall that surrounded the compound. Fortunately for me, none tried. Nonetheless, my sacrifice was marred. And the next day, while smuggling a sandwich to a Vietnamese friend who was holed up in a garage because he wasn't uniformed and might well have been shot in the mayhem on the streets, I got hit by a fingernail of shrapnel from a U.S. cluster bomb. After a few months of teaching and a few days of doing good, all I wanted was to go home. If I could do anyone any good, it would be in the United States and not in Vietnam where do-gooder politics were mere pretension.

That spring I quit the International Voluntary Services and got a job as a field representative for the Committee of Responsibility to Save War-Injured Children. COR was a small organization among the hundreds of foreign voluntary agencies comprised of teams of Americans, French, English, Swiss, Germans, Japanese, Iranians, Spanish, Filipinos, Koreans, and some do-gooders from the UNESCO. There were Quakers, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Mennonites, Brethren, and all kinds of Catholics, all doing good in some direct way by building hospitals and clinics, training nurses and doctors, doing specialized surgeries on brains, bones, eyes, and skins, making prosthetic limbs, and giving away blankets, foods, vitamins, maternity kits, surgical equipment, clothing, vaccines, and medicines. Among this army of do-gooders there were legions of vampires who thrived on the war in separate, personal, and peculiar ways. G.I.'s betrayed their sense of this with their instant distrust of anyone who came to Vietnam of his own choosing. (Partly because of their suspicion and resentment, I avoided G.I.'s. I did not trust them either. Early on I had met a Navy medic who proudly showed me "V.C. ears" in a mason jar of formaldehyde. And, often, as I was hitch-hiking a ride or freeloading in a mess hall, I would talk to soldiers whose conversation centered on their urethral drips, and often they wanted, understandably enough, my assurance that killing Vietnamese was O.K. Twice, I called home to my parents to relay a message to the parents of a soldier I had just met, but generally I avoided soldiers because, very simply, it made my survival all the harder when I thought of the victimizer as victim too). Anyway, I also learned to suspect do-gooders, remembering the young American Medical Association volunteers who had come to experiment at surgeries they wouldn't dare perform on an American; the U.S. AID boozer escaping a rotten marriage; the

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French priest who finagled a law, in this country of Buddhists, that would give relief supplies only to Catholics; the sad, homely Englishwoman who hung around orphanages to cradle dying children, victims like herself; the Quaker who had come to adopt orphans for American families but who spent himself righteously tongue-lashing sullen bureaucrats until they froze him out of the country; the young IVS volunteer whose holiest mission was to become a Vietnamese; and his spiritual twin, the young volunteer, a shy twit among Americans, who became a powerful whore-master among slum-bound Vietnamese; the professional New York woman reporter of human interest stories who shed compassion on Vietnamese and acid and barbs on other journalists, a woman who, brilliant, bitter, raw-nerved and awkward, used Vietnam to explain her life; the Baptist missionary who preached relentless anti-Communism to his captive, refugee fiefdom near Danang; the radicals and doves who spent their obligatory week in Saigon so they could summon the cameras when they arrived back home; and remembering myself, the anonymous hero, the sensitive witness, morality's spy among the Nazis, the saver of lives, and in other self-congratulating guises.

For a period of six months I began each day by carrying a couple of raw eggs to Nhi Dong Children's Hospital for a 12-year old boy who had so many open wounds that he was dying of protein loss. Then I would go to the Ministry of Interior to sit all day, usually, in clerks' offices until one official found time to decide on the children's passport papers, papers that I had brought to his desk from another's desk, papers that I would carry to other desks. This was called "walking the papers." I was exhausted at the end of a day of doing good; my rage smouldered at the bureaucrats' distance from the war and at the Americans (this kind of work made one feel *above* nationality) who had maimed those innocent victims or had left them sick and homeless. At first the work had a very right feeling: children, like the boy with multiple wounds, had their lives saved. But generally I was worn out. How much good did it do? (This is the question that will ruin a do-gooder, if he asks it of himself). I ran around for six months comforting children and their families, placating hospital personnel about the beds we were taking up with our cases, ingratiating myself with boozy bureaucrats, hamstering my way through the Ministries, and making myself ridiculous by trying to browbeat the U.S. Embassy into pressuring the Saigon

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government into speeding up the evacuation process. At the end of six months, I put thirteen children on an airplane for hospital care in the U.S., and then headed out to the provinces to take on more cases. Thirteen, out of how many thousands?

Still, as I saw it, the Committee of Responsibility had a moral edge on the other groups because it provided some Vietnamese children with extensive medical care in the U.S. while remaining politically clear of the Saigon government. The idea was that if even a handful of war-injured children were to appear in a dozen or so American cities, then the American people would be so undeniably confronted, shocked and outraged that they would stop the war. The proposition held a basic, simple belief in the wellsprings of human goodness. My disappointment was inevitable.

Even if our proposition held, it wasn't as easy as bringing a child to the U.S., inviting the press to the airport, patching the kid up and then sending him home, as agreed, to his family (don't think we didn't anguish over sending the kids home to the war; our sense of good just wasn't sufficient for kidnapping). The only children that we were permitted to evacuate were the most severe cases for whom no one could even dare pretend that help could be gotten in Vietnam. They required long term treatment, perhaps a dozen or so more surgeries and physical rehabilitation. They stayed a long time. Funny things happened to a few of them. The little ones started to forget their language after their Vietnamese convoyeuses returned home after three months. And while we all knew that once learned, a language could never really be forgotten and could easily be relearned, especially by a child, still it was unsettling. Some of the teenagers tried to become Americans. They strutted before adults and competed nastily with other children, learned loud manners and ordered their nurses about. Some of them got greedy, for they were flooded with gifts by the good-willed who chanced to meet them. In Boston, when a kindly woman met a boy who had lost three limbs in a mining incident, she took off an $18,000 necklace and wanted to give it to him. In Vietnam I had to keep asking myself, "Now, is it better for a child here to die or be maimed for life or to risk his being screwed up by well-intentioned people back home?"

In May, 1969, as well as traveling to the provinces seeking evacuations, I was also returning children to their families. At the end of May two boys returned, Huynh Duc, 15 years old, and Ho Bau, 11.

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Duc was around the fiftieth child that COR had treated. There were, of course, thousands of civilians wounded every year, despite Robert McNamara's 1967 estimate of some one hundred and twenty (which was based on the number of compensations *paid* at that time by the Department of Defense). Duc had suffered an open fracture to his right forearm from gunshot wounds which also required below-the-knee amputation of both his legs at the Danang General Hospital where we found him in 1968. Through the recommendation of Dr. Phung Tuan Hanh, a general surgeon at the hospital, Duc was sent to Hawaii for treatment at Kauikeolani Children's Hospital and the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children. Ho Bau also had been evacuated from the Danang Hospital on Dr. Hanh's recommendation, for Hanh would sometimes initiate on behalf of a family the detailed evacuation papers—which involved thirty-five copies for some forms and trips to four Ministries and the U.S. Embassy. With a broad smile he would say, "It's legal and it's right. These are all my children," gesturing to the ward where the patients were crowded two and three to a bed. "These are all my relatives." Just the same I knew we were kidnapping a few, but just the same—and this was the one measure that saved me from total bewilderment in this business of doing good—they would have died. Bau would have died. In June, 1968, about the time of the My Lai massacre, he was burned by napalm dropped from a plane in a Free Strike Zone near his house while he was playing with some other kids. He suffered third degree burns over 25% of his body, right arm, left and right legs. In the U.S. we had gotten him treatment in Boston at Massachusetts General Hospital and the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children. While in the U.S. Bau received a few letters from his mother (his father was dead). Miss Bui Thi Khuy, the 22-year old woman who served as his companion, translated them as best she could:

Duc, Duc, Feb. 5, 1969

Dear Son,

Bau, we received many letters from you. But we couldn't send you a letter. Bau, I know that you are alone in the different people and country. I remember every day and night very very much. Each time I call your name in my heart, I feel sadness and I don't know whom I will talk to. The War separated us. The war took my good son away. Because the situation of the War, so I must carry on. The first and last

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letter I send to you. I don't know what I tell you. I always pray God protects and gives you the good health. After you will return and live together with us. On that time the peace will come to my heart. Now I don't know when you come back. Today I write a letter let you know that we are well. Please write to me when you receive this letter. Miss Khuy, we are thankful and send you the best regards. Please our family send the best regards and thankful to Bau's foster parents for us. We will never forget them for their kindness to our son. Miss Khuy, please help my son write a letter for us.

Bau's Mother
NGUYEN THI XUNG
DUC DUC Tinh Quang Nam
South Vietnam.

Now three months later, with Miss Khuy, who had returned to Vietnam and who would soon take another group of children back to the U.S., I met the boys when they got off the plane in Saigon. Bau, except for his slightly scarred face, looked like a normal eleven-year-old who had just taken a long plane ride; tired, a little spaced out; wide-eyed at being in Vietnam. He was very happy to see Miss Khuy. Duc, his hair thickly oiled, wearing a long-sleeved white shirt and a tie with a bright stickpin, arrived with two mammoth suitcases, a Pan Am bag, and a crated pedal sewing machine. He would not speak Vietnamese, he hoped our house had a T.V., and said that he only intended to stay three months, for he would be returning to live in Hawaii. As proof that his return was already in the works, he produced a card showing his honorary membership in the Coast Guard Club of Hawaii.

At our house, for the next few days Duc complained that his stumps were sore from the chafing of his artificial limbs and that he couldn't eat Vietnamese food. When he started to hang in his room and play with his radios and watches, I began taking him out to lunch at working class restaurants in Saigon. Once some people snickered at his dressing like a middle-aged bureaucrat. Finally he gradually sold off most of his junk. And when gradually he found that Vietnam looked "a lot like Kailua," I decided it was time to get him home. Duc and Bau—who had meanwhile introduced Batman to the neighborhood kids—both lived in Duc Duc (Virtuous Teaching), a small village in the contested mountainous region of Quang Nam province.

Miss Khuy, Bau, Duc and I flew, with all their luggage, to

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Danang. At the hospital Dr. Hanh examined them with pleasure and had Duc walk about on his new legs. Duc walked proudly and without a waver. From Danang we had to take a U.S. Army Blackcat Huey helicopter for the road to Hoi An had been cut. Huey helicopters fly with their doors open and hold about six passengers besides the pilot, co-pilot, and gunner, who sits behind a big machine gun on a pivot post. Over the ocean the gunner opened up at the water. I couldn't see anything; maybe he was shooting at a whale. The noise was deafening. I suspected that he was firing to see the scare on Miss Khuy's face. From Hoi An we took another helicopter that was resupplying Marine field units patroling near Duc Duc. We flew for about thirty minutes over cratered fields, defoliated mountain forests and shining river loops. When we got to the village and hovered about a sea of brown thatch houses swelled by homes of new refugees, I wondered how we would find the boys' homes, for in a Vietnamese village there are no street names or addresses, and we had just a few hours before the supply helicopter would return; if we missed it we would have to spend the night, either in the village, which would not be safe for me, or in the Marine camp, which got mortared nearly every night and which would have been pretty rough on Miss Khuy.

Bau said he lived under a big pine tree. With all the luggage bouncing around on the rutted roads, we drove around in a jeep until we spotted, sure enough, a large pine tree. Bau's mother was at market. His old grandmother was there and she hugged him and seemed bewildered as the rest of us as we waited for his mother to return. A crowd of neighbors gathered. I asked Bau where the place was where he had been wounded; he pointed to an area about seventy-five yards from where we were standing. That was the Free Strike Zone. Anyone could be shot there at any time.

While Miss Khuy was talking to the grandmother and Duc was chafing to get to *his* home, Bau's mother came walking up the road. When a neighbor rushed out to tell her we were there, she threw her hands to her face and ran the thirty yards to the house, pushed through the crowd, and hugged her son. She wept and called his name. Bau looked at me, and then under the sheer weight of his mother's love, he was overwhelmed and began to cry too. Everybody was crying. Miss Khuy, who was crying (Miss Khuy, who, a week later in Saigon, was to be crushed to death by a two-ton military truck out of the control of its drunken driver), looked at me and I was crying. Bau's minutes of burning, his pain and endur-

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ance, his mother's love and the enormous distance that had separated them overwhelmed us all. After a few minutes, Miss Khuy spoke to Mrs. Xung and told her how to contact us if they needed help. Khuy gave Bau a hug and his mother some stamped, addressed envelopes.

Duc's father, Huynh Cat, who made rice paper for his living, was at their home near the market. (It was in the market that Duc had been cut down with other villagers when a G.I. went crazy and opened up on the crowd.) However, Duc's mother had just gone to Danang in response to our telegram to meet us at the hospital. Seeing his father waiting for us outside their house, Duc jumped down from the back of the jeep and strode to Mr. Cat, whose smile grew wider as he saw his son grown older, looking more like his father, and walking to him.

Back in Saigon, I congratulated myself on how well it had gone. Few complications. So, we had messed with their lives . . . we had done no harm. We had done some good. As I drew my work to a close and prepared a testimony on civilian casualties for the Senate Subcommittee on Refugees, Escapees, and Civilian Casualties, I liked to consider cases like Duc and Bau. (Forgetting, as best I could, the 9-year old girl who had her nose shot off and for whom we made, in New York, a veritable red garden hose of a replacement which closed up as soon as she returned to Vietnam.)

Some weeks before the collapse of the Saigon troops, as I was having breakfast and reading *The New York Times* just before walking up to the Penn State campus where I teach composition and poetry to students who were in junior high school when I was in Vietnam, I read on the fifth or sixth page that the village of Duc Duc had been caught in a crossfire and burned. I wondered what happened to Bau and Duc, especially Duc who can't run. At best, I could say, if they had escaped, that I had returned them home so they could become homeless. I had always known that it could happen. As I see it, there was nothing else I could have done. One must act, even if his acts fail, or, if they seem to succeed, are contaminated by other men. It is hopeless to look for personal reward in good works. This isn't a rationalization to protect oneself from disappointment. It means merely that as soon as one tries to profit personally from a good act, it is poisoned. There are no personal rewards in good works unless one is stupid (which only means "blind to consequence") in which case one's good works are more or less evil.

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There is no one to talk to about this for like many who have returned from Vietnam, I have returned a foreigner, one whose experiences and emotions are honed on the edge of memories from a place Americans seldom think of or would like to forget. For some reason which I do not understand American pleas for my help make me angry. Hitchhikers and United Fund collectors annoy me. Just the other day I was flying back to New York on a crowded flight when a young woman with two small boys asked me and the woman next to me if we would change seats with her and her 8-year old son so they could be next to her other, 7-year old son. "If you don't want to, just say so," she smiled when she noted my hesitation. She was seated across the aisle, one row up; her son was at her right; the son in question was across the aisle from her, in front of me, on her left. She wanted to sit right behind him. Handbags and passengers were pushing through the aisle. I had just sat down and had gotten my luggage stowed and I did not feel like moving. I said that if she didn't mind, I would stay where I was. She said "O.K." and then, in tears, suddenly lit into me: "People today are so unfeeling, so selfish," she said. "If you had children, you would understand!" Puzzled, I looked at her. If she had reached out her arm, she could have touched her son. I thought of the children who had littered the village battlefields to be picked up, perhaps, by U.S. helicopters, children who perhaps died on route or in field hospitals, whose parents would never know what had happened to them. I thought of the children I had evacuated, children separated from their families by years and by 10,000 miles. This American woman's distress seemed selfish and absurd, but, on her terms, reasonable. She was suffering a tragedy of a kind that I can no longer recognize. I should have been delighted that she had such a limited sense of personal tragedy, but personal tragedies are pretty easily felt, aren't they? And, more importantly, do they open up Americans to the pain of others? That we had waged war in Vietnam for ten years is evidence in response. Sorry, madam, I am an adept measurer of pain and yours doesn't count for much. I thought of explaining, but I didn't feel like it. Instead, I stiffly told her, "I understand."

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JOSEPH BRUCHAC

Feeder

Each time I fill
the bird feeder I made
from old cellar wood
nailed to the cut off
stub of an ancient
lilac tree

I feel the claws
of the chickadees
on my finger, their beaks
prodding the crevices
of my hands which hold
seeds of the sun

they are perfectly solemn
full of purpose and joy
as I watch them
from my human distance
which does not always
come between us

Cleaning the Spring

Numbed by the cold,
hands falling back
into the old
unconsciousness
of stone,
I keep working
scraping away
the leaves and silt
of a dozen seasons
until it opens

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then I no longer
feel the pain,
the weight of winter
gone away, flowed clean
with the trickle
of fresh water

The Elm People

1

Along the county roadsides
huge dying fountains
elm trees stand
fewer every year

The beetle has bored
into their limbs
left yellowing leaves
huge piles of trunks
rotting in landfills
around the towns

2

Elm was never
a tree to burn
its fibers too tough
flames from its branches
seem to keep in
the winter cold

Elms are tough trees
and even when
the road men have
cut down an elm
they can't dig out

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the roots which dive
beneath the concrete streets
and so the county crews
cut down close as they can
to the ground, not caring
what is left beneath the earth

3

The Longhouse People lived with the Elm
bark from its body covered their great houses
and where those trees lifted up their branches
the Iroquois People were there, making
carrying baskets and canoes, hide scrapers
and dishes, bowls and spoons from their brother

4

Funny thing,
a friend of mine
said to me,
how much we are
like those Elm trees

Used wrong we
don't amount to much
sometimes we look
like skeletons
along their
winter roads

But even when
the Elms that gave
us shelter before
the Dutchmen came
have all died off
we will still be here
like the tough deep roots
hanging on

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

Fauvism[1]

For J.A.S.

THE WAY WAS PREPARED for color to become an independent agent in painting during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Impressionism and its progeny moved toward suppression of subject matter by favoring landscape, which permitted greater flexibility in the distribution of hue and value than did the more conventional, and in many ways more demanding, figure tradition. This move was abetted by an increasing discreteness of touch (Impressionist comma, Pointillist dot, Divisionist dash) that tended to detach brush stroke from the objects it was nominally describing. Together, these two tendencies encouraged color to move freely over the surface of the canvas, responding to the needs of the composition itself rather than to the naturalistic demands of the subject matter. By 1906 the accommodation of coloristic freedom and naturalistic representation was almost at an end, and in a last burst of energy, like a candle that flares before dying, Fauvism pushed that accommodation as far as it was ever to go. Encouraged by exhibitions devoted to Van Gogh in 1901 and to Gauguin in 1905, a group of artists in Paris adopted variations of Divisionist technique, using them to apply extremely high-valued colors. The results were compositions of great density—and density was in most cases crucial to their quality—relieved only by unpainted areas between strokes or by variation in hue which, if properly handled, could amount to variation in value without suggesting shading. Overall, there was a certain frenetic character to these pictures at odds with the Olympian tradition of French painting, and one that accentuates the superficial similarities between Fauvism and contemporary northern European Expressionism. Expressionism, as its name implies, tended to use color for expressive rather than structural ends, however, and generally favored more mixed and less aggressive colors than Fauvism.

Although Matisse is usually taken to be the leading Fauve painter, and was among those exhibiting at the Salon in reference to which the word Fauve was coined, there is an important sense in which he is not a Fauve at all. Despite the fact that Matisse's struggle to liberate his color was contemporary with the most brilliant Fauve work, the years around 1906 were for him a time of relatively unresolved painting during which he wrestled with the problem of achieving a profound synthesis of color and structure based on Cézanne's example. In his earliest canvasses, Matisse had shown a preference for the clarity and calm of the French tradition as embodied in the work of such painters as Chardin. A growing interest in color, nurtured under Moreau's tutelage, led him away from the old-mastery mixed impasto of this work toward a more precise facture, and by the last years of the nineteenth century he had developed a variety of

[1] These reflections on Fauvism were occasioned by the exhibition, "Fauvism and its Affinities" held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from 26 March until 1 June 1976.

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pointillism that seemed to open new avenues to him. This, in turn, metamorphosed into a divisionism of the type developed by Cross and Signac, the style in which the major work of this period, *Luxe, calme et volupté*, of 1904–1905, is painted. Much noticed, *Luxe, calme et volupté* is neither among Matisse's most successful pictures nor his best, but it has particular importance in evidencing his seriousness and the type of painting enterprise to which he had chosen to address himself. That enterprise is at once daring and thoroughly traditional. Unlike the others labelled Fauve by Louis Vauxcelles, Matisse cleaved not simply to the figure tradition in painting but to its most ambitious manifestation, the representation of groups of figures, inevitably nudes, in outdoor settings. In the process, he kept the traditional tonal structure of dark foreground against light background—more obvious in the sketch for *Luxe, calme et volupté* than in the finished picture—as well as liberal suggestions of local color, particularly in his adherence to something approximating flesh tones for figures. He also reinforced the solidity of his figures and objects by internal shading and by borrowing from Seurat the contrasting tonal and coloristic halations that surround them. In adhering to these traditional schemata Matisse found himself in difficulty vis-à-vis coloristic freedom and nascent abstraction, in that his desire to draw and shade could not be easily reconciled with the fairly unsubtle divisionist paint application. Further difficulties arose in the tendency of dashes of similar hue or value to become areas, and in the unsuitability of Matisse's small-scaled application to the large-scaled ambitions of his painting. Not particularly large in size, the composition of *Luxe, calme et volupté* seems to demand a bigger arena in which to act. During the succeeding three years, until about 1908, Matisse continued to struggle with the problems he had set himself, working on relatively small canvasses but enlarging his divisionist touch and allowing it to coalesce into areas when that seemed necessary. Many of these pictures are made up of both divisionist and more broadly brushed passages. The broad brushing, with its modulations of value and revived suggestions of old master technique, frequently resulted in an unclarity—if the tonalities were darker one would speak of muddiness—that make these paintings far from Matisse's best. Beneath it all, however, one feels the motion of the powerful intellect and high ambition that witness Matisse's greatness and are evidenced in such pictures as the *Blue Nude* (1907), a strong and convincing composition despite faults that would in other hands have been its downfall. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the consolidation in Matisse's art that was to make possible the masterpieces of the succeeding decade is the transformation of *The Young Sailor* from its first version to its second. In the first, Matisse continued the brushy application that borrowed both from divisionism and from older painting, allowing such relationships as those among the chair, the background, and the sailor's right leg and arm to become indistinct. In the second, it is as if he swept away all hesitancy at one stroke to break through to a brilliantly convincing clarity. Keeping his dark foreground-light background schema, he allows each color to expand into a major area of its own, relieving the intensity of the hues with subtle modulations

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of value caused by the brush strokes themselves and by a minimal amount of internal drawing. The impact of the figure is reinforced, and the intensity of its colors relieved, by the light pink background that creates a color atmosphere in which it can convincingly be situated without in any way undermining the overall pictorial flatness. Although coloristically and philosophically at some remove from Fauvism, one is here on the threshold of a realization of Fauve ideas that the more orthodox Fauves themselves were unable to achieve. As he did with Cézanne and Cubism, Matisse has noted the most interesting painting around him, assimilating it to his own uses in such a profound and personal way as to set him quite apart from any movement of which he may be said to have been part or any influence to which he may be said to have been subjected.

Of the orthodox Fauves, the two best were Derain and Dufy. Although Derain had encountered Matisse and others in Paris around 1900, his service in the army interrupted his painting career and it was only in 1904 that he began the rapid development that was to produce the first of his Fauve pictures the following year. A large still life of 1904 suggests an interest in strongly patterned compositions, the patterns dispersed across the canvas and resulting from sharp value contrasts produced by strong lighting of the objects represented. By the end of the same year and early 1905 the areas of light and dark values tended to draw together and become larger, and as the hues in Derain's palette became more saturated these value differences gradually resolved themselves into variations in hue. This interest in hue raised to its highest intensity—particularly red, orange, and blue—was assisted by an increasingly Van Gogh-like facture of relatively small and discrete applications of pigment. During 1905 and 1906 Derain continued to work with such color and application, experimenting with pointillist facture as well, but finally, in the L'Estaque paintings of 1906, he largely suppressed brush stroke to settle into a manner clearly indebted to Gauguin. In these pictures, the most advanced, accomplished, and abstract to emerge from Fauvism, Derain manipulated his anti-naturalistic color to create patterns that flicker across the surface of the canvas denying distinctions between foreground and background. Such slight modulations as do occur within color areas accentuate their flatness by intensifying the variations in hue and are not used to create three-dimensionality or atmosphere. The flattening characteristic of these works results not only from the surface emphasis created by the aggressive color and even, patterned distribution of accent, but also from Derain's preference for head-on views through stands of trees lacing the foreground with networks of trunks and branches running off the canvas. A year earlier he had accomplished somewhat the same thing with sharp downward viewpoints, particularly in his London pictures. Given the radical nature of these canvasses, their density and coloristic freedom, Derain's preference for Gauguin (which freed him from the scale restrictions imposed by the brushwork of Van Gogh, Pointillism, or Divisionism) and a clear tendency for his painting to move toward monumental decorative composition, one is led to wonder why he never broke through to a consistent modernism of the kind Matisse was later to achieve, or even to

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something more extreme. The answer seems to lie in a want of intellectual force and in the vulgarity of sensibility that was at once Derain's strength and his weakness. His lack of intellectual force probably underlies the meteoric rise that was insufficiently grounded to be sustained, and his vulgarity of sensibility is certainly at the base of his preference for, and ability to handle, bright color and flattened composition. When he did attempt large-scale decoration, as in the 1906 *The Dance,* he catered only to his weaknesses. Although there are passages of strength and invention such as broad unmodulated areas of the background and the parrot at the upper left, the form of which is sustained by the relatively small paint areas of which it is built-up, the dancing figures themselves and the snake at the bottom of the canvas exemplify the merely decorative at its weakest. By 1907 Derain had retreated from his Fauve triumphs toward that coloristically restrained style for which he eventually became best known, a style which too much displayed his vices at the expense of his virtues. *The Bathers* of that year, another attempt at a large figure composition, maintains some flatness in the outlining of its forms and the reversal of its tonalities (light figures against dark ground), but its unrelieved heaviness suggests what Derain lost by not being willing or able to follow his brilliant Fauve color, and the freedom with which he disposed it, in the direction they seemed so obviously to lead.

If Dufy was a less ambitious painter than Derain, he was no less accomplished in his own terms. He came to Fauvism relatively late, and then through Matisse's example, but developed out of it a personal and wholly convincing style. From 1905 until about 1907 Dufy painted compositions that, like those of Derain and unlike those of Matisse, tended to flatten against the picture surface partly by the use of eccentric viewpoints, partly by dense and unmodulated color, and partly because of their preference for structural subjects—houses, piers, architectural elements, etc. Also like Derain, Dufy tended to scatter his accents throughout his compositions. His color, however, was wholly his own, subtler, calmer, and, if one may say so, more French than that of many of his contemporaries. Generally sparked by the deep saturated red-blue contrast that Dufy used throughout his career, his pictures of the Fauve years are developed around a gentle and appealing range of off-tones at relatively high value—violet, pink, soft green, etc. These are strengthened and held in place by firm, clearly articulated brush strokes defining the usually rectangular elements Dufy preferred, and only occasionally are compositions or parts of compositions weakened by formal indistinctness. In sum, the decorative was Dufy's great strength and continued so throughout his life, imparting to both his Fauve and his later work a substance that assures its survival wherever those who see it are able to penetrate beyond its attractive surface. Not a painter of Matisse's stature, Dufy nonetheless evidenced a harmony of talent and ambition that gives his work an appeal very much its own, one that enhances its basic quality.

Of all the painters associated with Fauvism, Vlaminck had the most to gain from it. He was, that is to say, most in need of its structural and coloristic armatures and once freed from its influence his art fell back into

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the amorphous pastiness in which it had begun. Although the 1900 *Man with the Pipe* shows just how unpleasant that pastiness could be, Vlaminck had begun to impose some order on his brushwork by 1904—and by 1905, partly with the help of some experiments in Divisionist technique, he had achieved a pictorial clarity that sustained itself for a year or two and then was lost forever. Like Derain, Vlaminck needed the strength to be gained from the juxtaposition of saturated colors, although he preferred greater value contrast than did Derain. If, however, his colors were as bright as Derain's they were subtler, and one finds in the pictures of 1905 and 1906 daring combinations of mustard, blue, and various shades of red—from the most saturated to brick, orange, and pink tones. Such pictures as the *Portrait of Derain* (1905) and the *Portrait of a Woman* (1905–06) benefit from this coloristic adventuresomeness, as well as from a broad, calligraphic paint application. In his landscapes, Vlaminck followed Van Gogh in both color and brushwork, benefiting immensely thereby. The only Fauve to depend consistently on black, or its equivalent dark blue, as a drawn skeleton around which to develop his compositions, he also to his detriment made extensive use of white—not as a color functioning alone in isolated areas but in its traditional role as a highlighting agent. This inevitably accentuated that pastiness which Fauvism had attempted to expel and to which his painting was eventually to succumb. Be that as it may, for a year or two Vlaminck benefited from external support of a kind calculated to develop what was best in his abilities, creating a series of vigorous works similar in style to, and only slightly less accomplished than, Derain's work of the same period.

Although many other painters were in one way or another touched by Fauvism—Fries, Marquet, Manguin, etc.—only Van Dongen and Braque stand out from it, and then only because of their subsequent accomplishment or reputation. Van Dongen's was a northern Fauvism, an Expressionism largely uninformed by Divisionism. At his best (*Modjesko, Soprano Singer,* 1908) he used intense color not for pictorial but for expressive purposes, to reinforce his images or to imbue them with specific feeling tones. Braque, on the other hand, was wholly French, sharing the pictorial suavity of Matisse and Dufy. Until he had the benefit of Cubism's clearly defined structure, however, his suavity was largely weakness. His Fauve-related pictures are uniformly worked out in light values applied with a delicate touch in areas that relate to each other only indistinctly. This, combined with his preference for close-valued compositions, gives his pictures of 1906–07 an ephemeral quality that works against them. It is no accident that Braque passed directly through analytical Cubism and Matisse did not, for Braque had need of it as Matisse never did. If Fauvism, with its brilliant color and clearly articulated brush stroke, held little of value to Braque, it offered Derain and Vlaminck a momentary opportunity to create pictures of strength and quality, confirmed others such as Dufy in their coloristic predilections, and supported Matisse in his quest toward the most important color painting of the first half of the century. For that, if for nothing else, it clearly deserves its place as the first major painting movement of the twentieth century.

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STEPHEN FARBER

Solitaire

IT IS INTRIGUING TO CONSIDER how gifted filmmakers with different sensibilities deal with a similar subject. Last year Francois Truffaut and Martin Scorsese each made a movie exploring the consequences of private obsession and solitude. At first glance the films seem quite dissimilar. Truffaut's *The Story of Adele H* is an elegant, austere film about romantic obsession—the true story of Victor Hugo's daughter pursuing an army officer who had jilted her. On the other hand, Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* is a realistic slice of contemporary urban life, saturated with violence; set in New York, it follows an Arthur Bremer-like figure obsessed with the idea of assassinating a Presidential candidate. Truffaut's classical, painterly style is radically unlike Scorsese's raw, improvisational naturalism. But the stylistic differences are finally insignificant; on a deeper thematic level, the films make intriguing companion-pieces.

Truffaut called *The Story of Adele H* a "musical composition for one instrument." *Taxi Driver* has a larger gallery of characters, but it too centers on a loner, a man living in almost total isolation. Both protagonists have broken the ties that most people take for granted; they have cut themselves off from family, lovers, and friends. At the opening of Truffaut's film, Adele Hugo has left her parents and travelled to Halifax, Nova Scotia in search of her lover. When he rejects her, she stays on, content to worship him from a distance; later she follows him to Barbados. During the course of the film, she alienates everyone who tries to befriend her, and by the end she is so completely estranged from the outside world that when she sees her lover, Lieutenant Pinson, on the street, she passes him without acknowledging him. Her solitude has become a terrifying, inescapable prison.

Similarly, the hero of *Taxi Driver*, Travis Bickle, is in flight from his past; he will not tell his parents where he lives, but once a year he sends them an anniversary card lying about his prospects. Travis is the city's invisible man, friendless and anonymous. At one point he tries to connect with a beautiful girl working for a Presidential candidate, but he is so out of touch with ordinary social graces that he takes her to a porno movie on their first date and unwittingly offends her. Later he tries to talk to another cabbie named Wizard, haltingly and inarticulately pleading for help. Wizard responds with a series of homilies that only increase Travis' anger and frustration. Travis cannot make contact; he is bruised by the teeming life of the city, but no one reaches him.

Both Adele and Travis live immersed in fantasy, and they lie constantly about who they are, almost as if they believed they could refashion their identity to match their dreams. Just as the taxi driver lies to his parents that he is doing "sensitive security work" for the government, Adele lies to her parents about her marriage to Lieutenant Pinson (causing an embar-

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rassment when the announcement is printed in a French newspaper). In Halifax she fabricates a variety of stories about Pinson, and she conceals her father's identity, harboring the delusion that she can erase the past by simply denying her origins. Living in an exotic foreign city where no one knows her family, Adele is free to imagine herself as the heroine of a romantic tragedy, a gypsy "born of father unknown." She builds an altar to Pinson and declares, "Love is my religion."

Travis is less intelligent than Adele, but he shares her belief in the life of the imagination. Obsessed with fantasies of purity, he yearns for a cleansing rain that will wash away the scum of the city. When he first sees Betsy, the campaign worker who enchants him, she is an apparition in white, his own Beatrice pointing the way out of the inferno. Like Adele, Travis imagines himself as a romantic figure—first as a dream prince who will carry Betsy off on a white charger, later as an outlaw hero who will achieve immortality through violent death. It is interesting that both Travis and Adele keep diaries, and they spend much of their time compulsively recording their most intimate feelings. Mesmerized by their own thoughts and dreams, they are desperately trying to validate their existence by transcribing all their experiences.

The filmmakers' point of view toward their heroes' solipsism is by no means one-sided. The characters' longing to transcend the painful realities that oppress them by taking refuge in fantasy is a human impulse that both Truffaut and Scorsese can appreciate. Thanks primarily to Isabelle Adjani's eloquent performance, Adele has a measure of dignity even when she is most wrongheaded; she carries herself like a doomed Hardy heroine. With even greater imaginative sympathy, Scorsese finds the poetry in Travis' fantasies. As his cab glides in slow motion through an explosion of red neon, or plunges into a stream of water, we can momentarily share Travis' dream of floating free, his futile desire to transform and redeem the scarred landscape of the city. The Bernard Herrmann score intensifies the bleak romanticism of Travis' alienation.

Yet the major impulse behind both films is to criticize this immersion in private fantasy. Adele's romantic infatuation is a form of narcissism; she is in love with her own exalted ideals, and Pinson is incidental to her hothouse passion. Withdrawing from all human contact, Adele destroys herself in pursuit of a worthless man who barely knows she is alive, and an epilogue informs us that she spent the last 40 years of her life in an asylum, writing her journals in a code that has only recently been deciphered. Travis' solitude is more than simply self-destructive; his loneliness generates hostility and resentment against the world that has ignored him. Brooding in isolation, spinning his gossamer dreams, Travis is gradually inflamed by a lust for violence that cannot possibly be controlled.

Truffaut and Scorsese come from different backgrounds and different cultures, and their films obviously reflect their individual preoccupations. But the affinities between the two works may not be purely coincidental. Many other works of art have wholeheartedly celebrated solitude and private fantasy. I suspect that the more skeptical point of view of these two films is, at least in part, a response to contemporary anxieties.

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France and America both went through an intensely political period during the late sixties. By now the fire has died down, and after a series of painful disillusionments and defeats, most radicals of the sixties have repudiated the political activism of that era. Displacing the dream of revolution, the new religion is introspection, reflected in all the cults of self-analysis and self-improvement, "consciousness-raising" seminars and meditation techniques that deify solitary experience. Neither *The Story of Adele H* nor *Taxi Driver* is an explicitly political film, but all films have political implications, and it seems interesting that Truffaut and Scorsese have both made films demonstrating the dangers of self-absorption, of breaking all ties with a larger community. This is not to reduce the movies to a simple message, but both films contain warnings against growing isolation, and implicit pleas for responsibility and involvement.

If *Adele H* and *Taxi Driver* spring from a similar impulse, it is revealing to compare the results. Both films set themselves a formidable artistic challenge: how to examine an obsessive, deranged, virtually psychotic character without simply repelling the audience. Surprisingly, Scorsese is more successful than Truffaut in meeting this challenge.

Truffaut, rightly praised as one of the great humanist directors, has made *Adele H* with icy clinical detachment. Repudiating the voluptuous romanticism of his early films, Truffaut has tried to imitate the ironic, dispassionate tone of Hitchcock, who is one of his idols. That impulse may be understandable, but in *Adele H* he has succeeded too well. Truffaut is so coolly sardonic in dissecting Adele's romanticism that we cannot guess why her story attracted him; he is unwilling to acknowledge that he might be susceptible to the dreams and aspirations that destroy her.

The film begins with Adele's arrival in Halifax and ends with her commitment to the asylum, and this curious structure accentuates the inadequacy of Truffaut's approach. There are no flashbacks dramatizing Adele's initial relationship with Pinson, or with her family, and although this was apparently a deliberate decision on Truffaut's part to eliminate any possibility of sentimentality, it has the effect of diminishing Adele's obsession. We never learn what first attracted Adele to Pinson, or what he saw in her; there must have been a time when their romance was more tender and lyrical, but Truffaut refuses to show the idealistic base of Adele's passion. He also refuses to examine Adele's relationship with her father, which might have clarified her pathological behavior. The theme of someone living under the shadow of a famous relative is a powerful subject, but Truffaut evades the family conflict, and robs the film of dramatic tension.

By limiting the film to a period when Adele's passion has already turned sickly and destructive, Truffaut presents her on one monotonous note. She is coldly withdrawn, neurotic, and masochistic from almost the first moment we see her, and she grows more demented as the film continues. Only one moment presents a different side to Adele's character—a brief flashback image in which she vows "to walk over the water to a new world"; her eyes are shining with the radiance of youth. That one image suggests something of the adventurousness and hopefulness of Adele's

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romanticism. But there should be more of that feeling of grandeur if Adele's story is to assume a genuinely tragic quality.

Although we may pity Adele, we are not deeply moved by her fate. On the contrary, we watch her breakdown with the curiosity and detachment of students at a psychology lecture; the complexity that we expect to find in a work of art is missing. Adele's masochism is offputting. She defines herself through her love for a rotten man, and while it is undeniably true that a great many strong-willed, talented women have spent their creative energy in this kind of self-destructive romantic passion, it is not entirely clear why Truffaut decided to make a movie about such a woman at this late date. If the film were richer and more imaginatively compelling, these questions would not arise. But *The Story of Adele H* is so single-minded in its portrait of Adele's mad love that we lose patience with her sooner than Truffaut may have intended. The unfortunate result is that Truffaut's urgent theme of the terror of solitude never quite comes into focus. Adele's case is too peculiar to be representative; the film has some interest as a study in abnormal psychology, but it never touches more universal dreams and fears.

In *Taxi Driver* Martin Scorsese confronts an even more repellent character—an assassin who achieves his only orgasm through slaughter—but thanks to the sensitivity of the script and direction, and to the brilliance of Robert De Niro's performance, the film succeeds in implicating the audience. Travis Bickle is by all civilized standards an appalling monster. Yet before *Taxi Driver* is over, we have gained understanding and even a measure of sympathy for the furies that drive him.

Travis is impossible to categorize. We never feel that we fully understand him, and this is what makes the film disturbing; we cannot keep Travis at a safe distance. The screenwriter, Paul Schrader, emphasizes Travis' contradictions, and we must sort out our own mixed responses to the character. When Travis takes Betsy for coffee, he is charming, perceptive, and appealingly vulnerable; when he practices his gunplay in front of a mirror, he is the embodiment of all our nightmares of urban barbarism. The contradictions multiply: the same man can plot to kill a Presidential candidate and try to rescue a 12-year-old prostitute from the corruption of the city. Travis' desire to reclaim the young hooker, Iris, is touchingly naive; yet we cannot separate that humane impulse from his desire to exterminate the pimps and gangsters who prey on Iris. Purity and perversion, salvation and destruction are all tangled up in Travis' imagination. Schrader respects the character's secrets, and Scorsese presents Travis' fantasies from the inside.

However, I think both Schrader and Scorsese would admit that De Niro brings the character to life. De Niro discovers the nuances that keep Travis electric and unpredictable—his shyness when flirting with a concession girl in a porno theater, his sudden fury when a campaign worker tries to touch his shoulder, his concentration while writing in his diary or polishing his boots, his idiot grin while talking to a Secret Service agent. A hundred startling details like these make De Niro's Travis Bickle one of the vivid movie characters who will live on as part of our shared experience.

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As a study of political assassination, the script is not strikingly original. The explanations provided are fairly banal—Travis' loneliness, sexual repression, bigotry, dreams of fame and glory. But the film is not conceived as a political manifesto. By leaving the candidate's political views rather vague, Schrader implies that Travis was simply looking for a target—any target—for his suppressed violence. The assassination plot is luckily underplayed; the filmmakers' interest lies elsewhere. Scorsese places Travis against a sharply-defined milieu of urban violence and decay. His horrifying vignettes of New York life suggest that Travis is a psychopath in a city full of madmen; his hostility is only one manifestation of the savagery that overwhelms the entire city. But even that sociological insight is not the chief strength of the film. Its real value is its intense, compassionate portrait of the inner life of an urban loner.

Because Scorsese and De Niro never condescend to Travis, we can see ourselves in the character, and this is what is most remarkable and unsettling about the film. Travis' loneliness, his hopeless romantic fantasies, and his desperate desire to validate his own identity reflect needs and longings that we all share to one degree or another. Travis is not a freak or a psychological aberration; he is *one of us* pushed a little closer to madness, and that makes Scorsese's warning about Travis' isolation all the more persuasive and insinuating.

The ending, however, is sadly disappointing. After the shocking bloodbath that climaxes the film, there is a feeble ironic epilogue which reveals that Travis has become a minor celebrity, and we see him back in his cab, carrying on as if nothing had happened. It is unclear whether he has been purged of his violent fantasies or whether he is ready to attack again. Since the film offers no indication, many people in the audience may interpret Travis' violent explosion as a legitimate, satisfying catharsis. The ending is morally and dramatically specious.

There are some other flaws—gaps in logic and credibility, awkward, self-indulgent scenes (particularly one in which Scorsese himself plays a psychotic taxicab passenger). Nevertheless, De Niro's devastating performance holds the film together even during its shakiest stretches. *Taxi Driver* is a provocative speculation on the dangers of imagination unchecked by real human interaction. Overripe, ragged, occasionally muddled, it is still one of the most compelling, disturbing visions of solitude ever committed to celluloid—a volatile document of our times, and a nightmare vision with enough terror, passion, and mystery to last.

Yet even *Taxi Driver* seems benign when compared to Roman Polanski's *The Tenant*, a blacker study of solitude than either of the two I have discussed. *The Tenant* has been advertised as a thriller in the tradition of *Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Chinatown* ("No one does it to you like Roman Polanski"). In truth it isn't particularly scary or conventionally suspenseful, and audiences lured in by the ad campaign have been baffled by the abrasive, unpredictable experience that Polanski has actually provided.

Like *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Tenant* is built around the disorientation of moving into a new apartment. Anyone who has ever lived alone in a large apartment building will respond to Polanski's jokes and oddball charac-

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ters—the accusing landlord, the suspicious manager, the warring factions of nosey neighbors. *The Tenant* begins almost like a Neil Simon farce on the perils of urban apartment-dwelling; but it twists and turns into a macabre surrealist comedy that is far less cheerful and comforting than the Simon brand. In the minor drama of moving into new surroundings, Polanski discovers a savagely effective metaphor for a more comprehensive and profound kind of disorientation and anxiety.

Trelkovsky, like Polanski, is a Polish emigre living in Paris; part of his discomfort arises from the fact that he is a foreigner who never feels quite at home with the natives. When he moves into the apartment of a girl who has died, he begins to suspect that his new neighbors are plotting against him. The movie would be more reassuring if the diabolical conspiracy that Trelkovsky imagines really existed. But Polanski seems to have designed this movie almost as a sly repudiation of the paranoid fantasies he exploited in *Rosemary's Baby*. In both films a character moves into a strange apartment building and becomes convinced that the neighbors are part of an evil cabal. But in this new film the conspiracy exists only in the mind of the tenant; we are not permitted to share his paranoia. At the same time Polanski refuses to allow us to dismiss the character as a psychotic freak. Trelkovsky is not demented at the beginning; he is a sweet, Chaplinesque figure, and so his disintegration is doubly disturbing.

Polanski offers no simple explanations for what happens. Instead he defines exile as the universal human condition, and this definition makes sense: many of us have left home to live in a world where we have no roots, surrounded by strangers and by unfriendly neighbors. But to Polanski that is only the beginning of the nightmare of exile and assimilation. The trauma of relocating eventually destroys Trelkovsky's sense of identity. He becomes convinced that his neighbors are attempting to transform him into the previous tenant of the apartment—a woman who committed suicide—and he helplessly surrenders to this bizarre sexual transformation. What is chilling about the movie is Polanski's suggestion that we have no identity apart from that provided by our environment. *The Tenant* is a comedy in many of its details, but it is also a Kafkaesque horror story, emphasizing how precarious our sense of self really is.

One might say that *The Tenant*, like *The Story of Adele H* and *Taxi Driver*, confirms the destructiveness of solitude. But unlike Truffaut and Scorsese, Polanski sees no real alternative. Truffaut makes it clear that Adele has turned her back on a viable human community; she rejects the kindness of the English couple who own the rooming-house where she lives. Even in *Taxi Driver* there are moments of human interaction that suggest the values that Travis has rejected. Polanski, perhaps the least humanistic of directors, refuses to believe in the possibility of meaningful community. In all of his films human relationships are marked by tension, suspicion, and resentment; his characters are aliens in a hostile universe. There is no consolation to be drawn from *The Tenant*. Polanski argues that solitude is the inescapable fact of life, and he also demonstrates that solitude will drive you crazy. The film admittedly has flaws: the dubbing is distracting, and the predictable ending is much too long in coming. Nevertheless, *The Tenant* is an audacious and brilliant film, with a powerfully rendered nihilistic vision that is not easy to dismiss.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Pop Turns Pale

POP DANCE IS A DECLINING commodity these days. It's been too easy and too available; meant for consumers, it seems for the moment bought out. Pop isn't supposed to be deep. It depends on regional, historical and cultural emblems that will lend the quality of recognition without enlightenment; it trades on the built-in attitudes and associations of the audience to give it conviction or "meaning." The sources of pop dance are so vital and authentic that if they become too noticeable, too literally translated, the secondhand product is no longer needed.

Our most successful pop choreographer, Twyla Tharp, makes it not just because she's good at anticipating pop trends (she choreographed Scott Joplin in 1972, foretold the Beach Boys revival in 1973). Tharp treats jazz like any other music, and two of her best works to date—*As Time Goes By* and *Push Comes to Shove,* both to Haydn—weren't pop ballets at all. Tharp is a pop choreographer the way Charles Ives was a pop composer. She tunes in on the culture, collects its idiosyncrasies and its characteristic gestures, and then makes dances that constitute strong new worlds of their own, reflective—but only at a distance—of their origins.

The CBS-TV Dance in America presentation of *Sue's Leg* last spring was a failure for me because it diluted the integrity of Tharp's created world. For some mysterious reason, only one Tharp dance could be shown on the program, so the opening half hour was devoted to film clips of the exuberant popular dancing of the 1920's and 30's. Jitterbugging, tap dancing, marathons, ballroom exhibitions and much more were collaged together, with sudden interjections of Tharp and dancers in almost the same poses and attitudes. By the time *Sue's Leg* was shown in its entirety, Tharp's choreography seemed no more than a pasted-up version of those early styles. But Tharp is unusual among pop choreographers—her dance isn't about the pop artifacts that it recalls to us. She'll use a cheerleading gesture or a jitterbug step because it expresses a time, a people, an energy. If someone hadn't invented it, she'd make up something else equally as telling. Most of the other pop dance we see picks up the signs of an era—the dances, the fashions, the slogans—but doesn't show us why people created these phenomena.

Perhaps the most shrewdly conceived pop dance of the 1975–76 season was Louis Falco's *Caravan,* choreographed for the Alvin Ailey company. Falco seized on the whirlwind popularity of the musical show "A Chorus Line"—but didn't attempt to deal with the things in American life that make "A Chorus Line" so alluring to our collective imagination right now.

Using a souped-up, symphonic-rock medley of Duke Ellington tunes arranged by Michael Kamen, Falco and designer William Katz put

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nineteen Ailey dancers in rainbow colored tank tops and stylish balloon pants that tied at the ankles. For most of the dance they bounced and flopped across the stage, looking like engagingly energetic rag dolls. Midway through the dance, Falco staged a bizarre chorus line. Dudley Williams danced a soft-shoe in front of a scrim raised just high enough off the floor to reveal several pairs of dancing feet behind it. Both Williams and the ensemble were shod in manic balsa wood clogs at least six inches high that made satisfying clunky noises as their owners shuffled and tapped and zinged the floor.

Falco's sense of the comic is basic, and big. With him a fall is not just a pratfall but a complete, instantaneous disappearance of the dancer from where we have been watching him to another spot several feet lower. Later, a whole group of dancers do this fall on cue. The platform shoes are the same kind of joke. He doesn't *play* his jokes either, the dancers who perpetrate them just go right on as if nothing were happening, though it's all too outlandish to be ignored. There's a quality of goofiness, and of personal participation that the Ailey dancers exhibit nowhere else.

I thought Falco's duet for Judith Jamison and Warren Spears was especially inspired. He used the Ailey superstar almost as if she were like the other women in the company. She and Spears play quite equally to one another, she gets lifted—a maneuver not often choreographed for the six-foot Jamison—and sometimes looks almost vulnerable. Throughout *Caravan* Jamison does the same kind of funky, casual movement as the other dancers, yet she retains her natural authority. I respect Falco for letting us see how strong she can be without resorting to her stereotyped black mama role, or its imperious, balletic alternative.

Falco's work is as messy as it's always been, but in the context of the Ailey repertory, which is now so organized, so calculated that it has hardly any life left, *Caravan* really pleases the audience. Falco's movement style is a loose-limbed, laid-back descendant of the Humphrey-Weidman-Limón looping, plunging, suspending lyricism. As opposed to his artistic progenitors, Falco seems to have little sense of the outward shape or direction of the movement; he's literally goalless. He likes to show the spending and exhausting of energy, to arrange accidental, often spectacular contacts between the dancers. But he's not at all interested in form; his choreography almost never has an overall drive or development, nor does he vary his movement to give it particular emotional coloration. In its unconcern for spatial limits or patterns, Falco's dance looks curiously childlike, and it has a pleasant, humanizing effect on all the Ailey dancers. They seem to be having such a good time not worrying about how straight their legs are in extension.

Most of the remaining Ailey repertory is so dependent on formula as to be indistinguishable one dance from another. Some critics continue to call it "jazz" or "black," perhaps out of a desire to stamp with approval whatever is so obviously appealing about it. Ailey certainly created a style, but the style is jazz only in its moments of structuring popular dance movement for the stage, and it's black only because Ailey is black. His

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dance draws from those two American cultural streams only superficially—in fact, it may contradict them more than anything.

Jazz, whether jazz music or jazz dancing, does use the instrument more flexibly, even oddly, than more traditional forms. In dance, the lower body is very fluid and articulate—I'm thinking of the old tap dancing hoofers—and the torso can mold or segment itself in small eccentric ways. These movement possibilities have become incorporated in Ailey style, and in the Broadway-TV dancing that is related to jazz, as large, spatially clear gestures. The improvisational aspect of jazz, the individualistic, unpredictable, affirmative quality that comes out of its solos and ensembles, has crystallized into Ailey's high-energy stage manner. This audience-oriented dynamism is so close to the manufactured excitement of the Broadway musical that a dancer unfamiliar with both genres might not be quite sure there are two. Mikhail Baryshnikov looked puzzled in *Pas de Duke,* the number Ailey choreographed for him and Judith Jamison, and probably his instinctive good taste as much as anything kept him from selling it too hard. Falco's chorus line works because it is so pointedly *not* trading on the choreographed hip thrust and the back-teeth smile.

Ailey's contribution to the development of black dance is hard to define though it's certainly not in doubt. At this point I see almost nothing in his work that specifically reflects the cultural history of American blacks. Sometimes characters are named for famous performers or leaders, but they don't display any particular qualities or operate within the dance context any differently from their related Ailey types in other dances: the spiritual leader slated for martyrdom, the performer destroyed by her own appetites and those of her public, the sensual lovers, the matriarch, the juvenile delinquent/embryonic revolutionary. Other black choreographers have added to Ailey's catalogue, but not extensively. Having created his types as expressive models, the way other modern dancers did—most of them over 15 years ago in his first pieces—Ailey continued to work with them as elements in his choreographic process, as balletic instruments to raise or lower the intensity of the dance at any given moment. In the same way, the classical ballerina may once have represented a queen, but now she simply does the fanciest dancing.

Theoretically, it would be possible for any black choreographer to create his own types, project his own version of the same events or conditions, or less familiar ones. But in fact most black dance we see nowadays is a direct Ailey rip-off. Not just the character types but the mannerisms, the body shapes and energies, the whole style of performing are imitations of what Ailey's company does, which derives from white precedents as much as black ones. I think what is black about this black dance is something more contemporary and less thematically recognizable, less easy to pin down than a portrait of Malcolm X or an interpretation of jungle drums. Ailey's dance is a metaphor for the risen black consciousness. With Ailey black is not just beautiful, black is sexy, powerful, opulent, and in touch with its feelings. The Ailey dancer symbolizes mastery in the psychological sense. He or she is on top of it, flaunting it,

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for us all to see. Interestingly, none of the whites in his company give me this feeling—though many of the Orientals do. Perhaps the last charismatic white dancer Ailey ever had was Louis Falco, who danced with him for a season or two several years ago.

Ailey's movement language, systematized and regularized from its distant expressive origins, has become a sort of code, a vehicle for body glorification, as ballet technique, which developed out of the intricacies of the French court dance, now epitomizes perfect motor control and mastery to us. The Ailey dancer turns very fast and very many times, often while traveling across the stage, but he adds to the turn a U-shaped position of the arms or an arched-back torso or a second, polyrhythmic rotation of the head. Or, without interrrupting the spin, he sinks to the ground and spirals up again to his feet. He may begin a run across the stage with a high front kick that thrusts so hard it snaps the upper body and head backwards toward the ground, or he may step languidly with a bent knee and a high, curving back leg, his arms scooping into the air from below.

Instead of calling attention to the step by harmonizing with it, as the arms and torso do in ballet, Ailey's body shapes are ornamental. Like some dances of Indonesia and the Orient, Ailey's dance calls attention to the curves and undulations of the body, rather than to complicated rhythms or enchaînements. The women take little fast, mincing, wiggling steps when they are being seductive, they ripple their arms for show, they do huge, percussive contractions of the center body, in profile to the audience so that we can appreciate the incurving of the torso. Often the Ailey dancer works with a fully extended, even overextended line, the better to amplify the body and to contrast with its baroque embellishments.

The energy is highly charged. The dancers always look as if they're going through some peak experience, though nothing narrative or even specifically expressive may be going on. Ballet and most other forms of Western stage dancing do the same thing in the interest of theatricality; Ailey's dance is a higher than usual turn on because the body shapes support rather than play down the excessive performance energy, and because the thematic associations of the dances and the music are so emotionally charged.

Ailey's new work, *Three Black Kings,* premiered at the New York State Theater during the summer season, presents three male solo figures, each with symbolic and religious significance: King Balthazar, King Solomon and Martin Luther King. The dance is a fairly routine exposition of the Ailey vocabulary, each King having one section to himself. Balthazar takes a succession of devotional poses while a robed male chorus whirls in expanding and contracting vortices around him. Solomon enters with a group of women in harem pants, chooses one, and with her dances one of the two standard Ailey duets, the slow, lyrical one, not the peppery, temperamental one. Martin Luther King exhorts and blesses a joyful crowd and is eventually displayed by the same crowd in various attitudes of crucifixion.

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None of the three central figures meets the others in the course of the dance, relieving Ailey of the need to develop or connect the dance ideas associated with each one. The suggested martyrdom at the end is merely a stage device, creating an effective tableau in the absence of a dramatically motivated climax. Nothing could demonstrate Ailey's pop orientation better. He doesn't want to sell us an idea or persuade us of an ideology, so he doesn't try to provide us with dramatic consistency. He knows we're sold, we're only waiting to be plugged in.

In *Pas de Duke,* the one occasion recently when he might have pushed our ideas of dance or the dancer just a bit into the unknown, he chose instead to stay safely with his stars' obvious popularity and attractiveness. Where he might have made something odd and stunning, he made it merely ingratiating. His message was almost quaint: equality—blacks are as captivating as whites, women are as fabulous dancers as men. Using the structure of the classical pas de deux, with some reverses and surprises and his own balletic-modern movement, he posed the dancers in a companionable competition, purged of the sexist classical conventions. In a way, he stacked the cards. Counting on the audience's sympathy for Jamison as an underdog—woman, black, modern dancer—he pushed her beyond her usual tricks and held back Baryshnikov. Neither dancer was allowed to outdo the other, and though the whole thing was pleasurable, it was bland. It lacked any friction, sexual tension, even role-playing, that might have shown the dancers were there to do anything but promote brotherhood.

This streak of high-mindedness is not an affectation with Ailey. Like Duke Ellington, to whom Ailey devoted a week-long tribute in the summer season, Ailey cares very much about being a serious artist and making his art serve serious ends. And like the Duke, Ailey often founders in his own successful gambits. Any of the things that might detour the company from its polished middle-of-the-road would work against its survival. The Ailey is this country's first all-pop dance company. The audience isn't confused—or intrigued—about what the Ailey does, as it sometimes is when Twyla Tharp follows Fats Waller with Bach. While the Joffrey legitimizes its pop agenda with equal parts of the classics, while Ballet Theater gropes for new audience pleasers from pop dance to star vehicles to opulent oldies, the Ailey company just does Ailey's thing—part high style, part community uplift, part star-biz. I don't know how we could expect the Ailey dancers or Ailey himself as a choreographer to produce deep psychological portraits when for years they've been trading in hype.

I found it significant that the artistic core of the Ellington week, the creation of five new works by young black choreographers, was carried out not by the professional company but by the Ailey II, a junior ensemble made up of students and apprentices. To these young performers fell the challenge of creating and interpreting the stylistically diverse work of Merce Cunningham alumnus Gus Solomons Jr., Graham-influenced Christyne Lawson, earthy, individual Dianne McIntyre, and the Ailey-esque Alvin McDuffie and Raymond Sawyer, while the main company banged its way through our old favorites.

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Whatever Ailey may do to prop up his artistic standing, the company's priorities are clear. His audience, largely white, wants to believe that, in the words of the program, this is a company "To elevate the spirit of man; to celebrate the beauty of mankind . . . a reflection of America at its best." This audience loves its entertainment in the form of Judith Jamison going round for round with Mikhail Baryshnikov. And, I think, above all it finds in the Ailey a satisfying and politically acceptable way of projecting its sexual fantasies. Ailey is black exploitation without the sting. His dance demonstrates what some whites secretly suspect, that blacks are more sensual, more physically and sexually potent than whites. But it doesn't threaten whites. It has no overtones of mutiny or violence. It has, on the contrary, the idealistic tinge of respectability to make our enjoyment perfectly legal.

Notes on Contributors

JAMES BAKER HALL teaches at the University of Kentucky and has recently completed a book of poems and a novel.

October Light, a new novel by JOHN GARDNER, has just been published by Knopf. Mr. Gardner teaches at Bennington College.

PABLO ANTONIO CUADRA*, one of Latin America's outstanding poets, is the author of thirteen volumes of poetry. The sequence, *Cantos de Cifar y del Mar Dulce,* from which this selection has been made, has its roots in the lake country of the poet's homeland, Nicaragua. GRACE SCHULMAN's first collection of poems, *Burn Down the Icons,* is forthcoming from Princeton University Press. Thanks are extended to Ann and Xavier Zavala for their valuable cooperation in the selection and translation of these poems.

A former student and teacher at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, EUGENE K. GARBER* is now on the faculty at Western Washington State College.

RORY HOLSCHER* is a young poet who teaches remedial English in Indiana.

A collection of BREWSTER GHISELIN's poems entitled *Waters* will be published by Mill Mountain Press of Seattle, Washington.

BARRY SPACKS teaches at M.I.T. His latest collection of poems, *Teaching the Penquins to Fly,* is in the Godine Chapbook Series.

JOHN BALABAN* is now teaching in Romania on a Fulbright lectureship.

JOSEPH BRUCHAC* is the author of a book of poems, *The Earth is a Drum,* from Cold Mountain Press and a collection of Iroquois folk tales, *Turkey Brother,* from The Crossing Press.

STEPHEN FARBER has recently been made film critic for *New West* magazine.

JOSEPH EPSTEIN* is the Editor of *The American Scholar.*

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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Reviews

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Is Fiction Necessary?

YOUR NOT-SO-HUMBLE CHRONICLER ought to make a confession, as we say nowadays, up-front. This is that, as the years go by, he finds himself reading less and less fiction, or more precisely contemporary fiction. The big-ticket items, the proven products—the Bellows, the Naipauls, the Solzhenitsyns—he does read. If asked by the press to review a novel, he will sometimes do so, but sometimes, in the midst of doing so, he will ask himself: if I had not promised to deliver this review, if I were not being paid for writing it, would I even continue to read this book? The answer, as will be clear from the fact that question has even been raised, is too often No, most certainly not. Such, for example, was the case with Joseph Heller's great clunker of a novel, *Something Happened,* a book that through its many hundreds of pages prompted only one question, Who needs it? (Actually, two questions: Who, apart from those being paid to write about it or teach it, reads it?) Under a previous stewardship, *The New York Times Book Review* used to bunch together a number of reviews of new novels toward the end of each of its weekly issues. "Unnecessary fiction," a friend of mine used to call it. Since that time a good deal of fiction has come to seem, to this chronicler at least, unnecessary.

By these remarks I do not mean to imply that the novel is being replaced by journalism, or that ours is an age of criticism, or autobiography, or sociology, or any such bunkum. I mean to say that our novelists are by and large less good. Although there is something to the claim that the contemporary world is less tractable to the methods of the novel, it is closer to the truth to say contemporary novelists seem to know less about the world, are less subtle about what knowledge they do have, and hence have less claim upon our interest. In the United States one of the problems is the university—that continuing WPA for novelists—which has taken them out of the street and out of society. A novelist out of society is a fish out of water, except that the latter has the good grace to die while the former will go burbling on as long as there is a publisher in the house. Out of society, and hence out of touch with the world in its day-to-day reality, our novelists retreat into abstraction. Yet why is it that, however abstract the general tenor of a contemporary novel, the sex in it can be relied upon to be carefully detailed? Perhaps it is that sex is all the particular knowledge of the world left to the university novelist. If present trends continue, we can look forward to novels in the future that will be peopled by genitals sitting around discussing fashionable ideas.

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These bleak observations come from someone who was educated largely on novels and does not regret his education—from someone who has always felt, and feels yet, that the novel deals with a kind of truth as high, if not higher, than that available from any other knowledge. The truth is the truth of human destiny, which is not the sole but certainly the best subject of the novel. Perhaps, then, only someone who takes the novel so seriously could come to be so disappointed in it, or in writers who have misused the form and along the way cheapened the tradition. Fiction is a house of many mansions, no less a practitioner than Henry James has told us, but there are moments when it can take on the look of a quite sleazy housing development.

Consider, for starters, *Babble*[1] by Jonathan Baumbach, a book that appears under the imprint of the Fiction Collective, a publishing concern set up for printing books that, ostensibly, have no commercial audience (though three segments of *Babble* appeared in *Esquire*). The Fiction Collective! At the mere mention of the name one takes off one's hat and places it over one's heart, for it would seem to stand for all that is truth and beauty and cultural courage: art difficult, demanding, undebauched. Not certainly for a commercial audience, the works of the Fiction Collective, but for whom then are they intended? Of *Reruns,* Mr. Baumbach's previous novel, also published by the Fiction Collective, a reviewer wrote: "*Reruns* is about that place—no small terrain—where cinema, dream and memory meet, and no other novel has mapped it as well." Would it be Philistine to insist that it sure sounds like a small terrain to me, and that, thank you very much, I think I am able to get there fine without a map?

An avant-gardist with tenure—the cultural equivalent of the 1960's guerrilla with tenure—Mr. Baumbach is the director of the creative writing program at Brooklyn College and himself writes literature about—what else?—literature. The hero of *Babble* is an infant who is put through a number of adventures that need not be retold here. The spirit of the book is best conveyed by its own advertising, which, on its jacket, runs: "*Babble,* a babybook for our time, is a fiction about (1) loss of innocence, (2) rites of passage, (3) family life, (4) babies, (5) baby-sitters, (6) war and peace, (7) robots, (8) raw youth, (9) crime and punishment, (10) stories, (11) sex and death, (12) language, (13) advanced education, (14) love, (15) the invention of culture, (16) mystery, (17) play, (18) fathers and sons, (19) superheroes, (20) the dehumanization of art."

As will have been gathered, with Jonathan Baumbach we are in Barthelme country, though in a rather shabby suburb of what is to begin with itself a rather dreary town. All the signs are there: the anxious self-reflexive comments about the story we are reading; the many thin jokes about narrative itself; the recurring, boring, and of course highly interpretable dreams. The jokes come fast but not very furious, and Baumbach makes us rethink the proposition that the worst puns are the best. Only a scant 117 pages with margins wider than last year's neckties, so predict-

[1] BABBLE, by *Jonathan Baumbach.* Fiction Collective. $8.95; $3.95 paperback.

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able is *Babble* that it is difficult to get up the energy needed to understand it. To draw parallels, to trot out one's knowledge of Freud and others of the Viennese delegation, to play the rest of what (confronted with so fragile an object as this novel) seems only a silly game—to attempt criticism, in short, can only be viewed as becoming an accessory to a crime.

The crime is not so much fraudulence—though possibly a case could be made for it too—as it is puerilism. In his book of 1936, *In the Shadow of Tomorrow,* J. Huizinga wrote: "Puerilism we shall call the attitude of a community whose behavior is more immature than the state of its intellectual and critical faculties would warrant, which instead of making the boy into the man adapts its conduct to that of the adolescent age. The term," Huizinga continues, "has nothing to do with that of infantilism in psychoanalysis. It is based on the observation of evident cultural and sociological fact." Huizinga thought that the country in which puerilism could be "studied most thoroughly in all its aspects, from the innocent and even attractive to the criminal, is the United States." Although he did not single it out, Huizinga would not, I think, have been surprised to meet with various strains of puerilism in our literature.

Jonathan Baumbach exhibits one strain of puerilism in the American novel—though it is not restricted to America alone—that of the jigsaw puzzle mentality in literature: here are all these pieces (recall the twenty things that Babble is said to be about), see if you can put them together so that they make some sense. But there are other strains of literary puerilism: a pluralism of puerilism. One of the strongest of them is not confined to an adolescence of subject matter but of understanding, pose, and point of view. Bailiff, bring in Messrs. Clancy Sigal and Vance Bourjaily.

Clancy Sigal—the author of two previous books, *Weekend in Dinlock* and *Going Away,* the latter of the two making something of a splash roughly fifteen years ago—has been a writer long silent. The reason for his silence, it turns out, has been writer's block, which we learn about in his new novel, *Zone of the Interior.*[2] Mr. Sigal is a writer who leans heavily upon the autobiographical, and so this new novel, whatever its author's insistence upon its standing as "a fiction, a work of the imagination," is clearly a *roman à clef;* or, as John Simon might put it, a *roman* with feet of clay. In it we learn that not long after his departure from the United States in political anger for a new life in England, what happened to the Left in this country happened to Clancy Sigal in England: something of a breakdown.

Mr. Sigal evidently had considerable dealings with R. D. Laing, whom everyone will remember as having come after Marshall McLuhan but before Werner Erhard in the passing parade of two-year gurus. Among his other distinctions, Laing was the man who claimed a superiority for schizophrenia over normality and in his various writings held out the promise of politicizing psychiatry. In *Zone of the Interior* Laing is named Dr. Willy Last as Clancy Sigal is named Sid Bell as Doris Lessing (though she

[2] ZONE OF THE INTERIOR, by *Clancy Sigal.* Thomas Y. Crowell. $8.95.

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plays a minor, for the most part off-stage role) is named Coral, author of *Loose Leaves from a Random Life*; cognoscenti can doubtless fill in more fictional with true names. As with most romans à clef, vengeance seems a good part of the motive behind Clancy Sigal's novel. Or at least vengeance struggles with the need to expose the sad and serious problem of the treatment of mental illness. Vengeance is reserved for Dr. Last-Laing, whom Mr. Sigal would like now to do in. Dr. Last-Laing, it seems, is responsible for Mr. Sigal signing up for yet another false revolution—this time round as a "mind commando" in the consciousness revolution—and with predictable results.

Slogging through its pages—on page 148, far out in the swamp, I scribbled the following note: "Past the half-way point; no hint of plot in sight; no hope of any character changing in any way; mental scurvy threatened because of absence of aesthetic or intellectual rations"—slogging through its pages one felt that *Zone of the Interior* was a book written in the wrong form. It had been better done as autobiography, for the autobiographical really is the impulse behind it: to expose, to even scores, to set a painful experience in perspective. Perhaps it might have been an autobiography had it not been for British libel laws. (As I understand these laws, and their chief difference from American libel laws, in America the truth is a defense against libel, whereas in England the greater the truth the greater the libel. How much that says about the difference in temper between the two societies!) As it stands, *Zone of the Interior* is devoid of the dramatic interest necessary to a novel and of the force of argument necessary to a work of intellectual prose. Clancy Sigal has had, one might say, the worst of both worlds.

But an even greater obstacle lay across Mr. Sigal's path; and this is that of the insane as subject matter. Our man seems, at various times, to be playing the schizophrenics in his book both for laughs and for tears. Apart from a single good scene (that in which the neighbors are invited to visit Dr. Last's free-form madhouse Meditation Hall, modelled after Dr. Lang's Kingsley Hall) and a splendid one-liner (that describing a patient-therapist at Meditation Hall as having been "expelled from Summerhill for behavior offensive even to A. S. Neill")—Mr. Sigal cannot have it both ways, which is, I fear, how he would indeed have it, and in almost every respect. Or if one is to have it both ways—which is neither morally objectionable nor technically impossible—then one had better be a better artist than Clancy Sigal is in this book. His is a subject, like so many others in contemporary life, best fitted to the talents of Evelyn Waugh.

If Clancy Sigal is not Evelyn Waugh, neither is Vance Bourjaily F. Scott Fitzgerald, though I think that he, Mr. Bourjaily, would like to be. Every so often he will command a Fitzgeraldian turn of phrase—"the heart-stopping smell of lilacs" in his new novel[3] is one such—and a segment of the same novel is entitled "Fitzgerald Attends My Fitzgerald Seminar," a notion with possibilities that Mr. Bourjaily does not, alas, bring off. "Tell

[3] NOW PLAYING AT CANTERBURY, by *Vance Bourjaily*. The Dial Press. $10.00

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me whom you admire," Sainte-Beuve said, "and I shall tell you who you are." If one happens to consider, as I do, F. Scott Fitzgerald as by and large a writer of books for boys—for boys, to be sure, between the ages of sixteen and thirty—then to be so in thrall to him as Mr. Bourjaily is in his fifties is, at least partially, to stand convicted of literary puerilism. But more is involved in the charge than Mr. Bourjaily's admirations.

Vance Bourjaily is a writer of the generation who went off to World War Two. *The Violated,* a novel of his about that war and about much more beside, was especially good. I myself shall never forget him for creating, in his novel *Confessions of a Spent Youth,* a character with the wondrous name of Central Park Wes. But Mr. Bourjaily's fiction has tended to appear less frequently since he himself disappeared into teaching in the writing program at the University of Iowa. He has, it turns out, been twelve years at work on *Now Playing at Canterbury,* which is a book not at all in the university mode—the mode of Pynchon, Barth, Barthelme—but has in fact been written partly in reaction to such fiction. In a recent interview, Mr. Bourjaily has remarked: "Serious novelists have become more involved with language and less with narration. In a quixotic way I decided to get back to the old narrative frame and try to regain some of the vitality that has been lost in this emphasis on how a story is told over the story itself."

The story itself has indubitably lost ground, probably since Joyce; and since Joyce, too, it can probably be said that most fiction divides itself betwixt that which relies on style and that which relies on story—though the two need not be always incompatible—with those that rely on story being, I should say, better. Now comes Mr. Bourjaily, a defender of story. The Canterbury of his title refers to that of Chaucer's, and his novel is intended, as he has said, to be "an encyclopedic work on modes of narration." The novel itself is set round the production of an opera to be given at a place more than suspiciously like the University of Iowa. Each of the many principal characters in the novel, who are also characters in or otherwise connected with the opera, departs at one or another point from the main narrative to tell a tale of his or her own. Many tales, told in many voices, result. The parallels with Chaucer are not intended to be exact, but the rawness, the ribaldry, and the high-spiritedness of the tales are doubtless intended to partake of the feel of *The Canterbury Tales.*

A sprawling novel, with many characters, locales, indeed typefaces, *Now Playing at Canterbury* is at the same time still a curiously academic novel. It is academic not so much in its setting—though it is partially that, too—as in its point of view and its blinkered view of the world. To speak of fiction as academic is to speak of it, really, as boyish, in the sense of being shy of experience, unworldly generally, and absolutely obsessed with sex. (In Paula Fox's new novel, *The Widow's Children,* a character remarks of a recent novel: "Not still another report from the universal crotch.") So many of the tales told by Mr. Bourjaily's characters are about sex in one form or another—from radical women specializing in fellatio to tenors who have come close to castration—that it is almost a relief to turn to

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those of the tales that are about violence. (Many of course are about both.) Throughout Mr. Bourjaily has a mistaken penchant for cuteness: for female characters that speak in (unspeakable) similes, for male characters who think like (how else to say it?) characters in rather second-rate novels. The good things in Mr. Bourjaily's big novel turn out to be the small things: the details about a Mercedes 390 SL, the information that "radical men tend to run kind of small," the recipe for a "soul martini," which is cheap gin on the rocks. But the final criticism is that there is no center to this ambitious novel; if there is plot aplenty, narrative running every which way, point of view remains absent. Or when it is present, it turns out to be sadly commonplace. Mr. Bourjaily is a defender of story in fiction, but there is story and there is story. The story that counts for the novel must have the weight of destiny to it, which is, alas, precisely what these tales in *Now Playing at Canterbury* do not have.

Reading such novels as the Baumbach, the Sigal, the Bourjaily, one wonders for whom they were intended. Reading them one feels one understands better—indeed begins to side with—the businessman of yesteryear who used confidently to say: "Nope, I don't go in much for fiction." Why, confronted with such determinately collegiate performances, should he? The harsh truth is that these books are not for adults. Who, then, might they be for? Perhaps for that new grouping in American life: the permanently ageless. By the permanently ageless I have in mind those people in their 30's, 40's, 50's—can there by now be some in their 60's?—who simply refuse to age, but who will go to their graves in denim and sideburns, eternally youthful in mind if desiccated in body. Such people might like to make arrangements beforehand to include in their caskets the novels of Kurt Vonnegut. Mr. Vonnegut's most recent novel, *Slapstick*,[4] seems a characteristic performance. A relic of the 1960's, Mr. Vonnegut combines, in a way one would not have heretofore thought possible, portentousness, fatigue, and anti-Americanism. In the Prologue to *Slapstick* Mr. Vonnegut, in an autobiographical vein, writes: "I cannot distinguish between the love I have for people and the love I have for dogs." A most interesting admission for a novelist. To summarize a work of science fiction is to load the gun against it; to summarize a work of science fiction of which one does not think well is to squeeze the trigger. *Slapstick* will not be summarized here, but instead we will get right to its message, which is that we must love one another or die. One would have thought that such a message could not be repeated too often; yet fine sentiments, as M. Gide remarked, do not make art. In the novels of Kurt Vonnegut, where they are mixed with politics, cuteness, and much flatulent prose, they do not even make fine sentiments.

In the science fiction world of *Slapstick* gravity is badly askew, and one might say that all the novels discussed thus far have something of the same problem. They lack gravity, not of course the physical force but the sense of seriousness about life that a novel must have—even when it is being

[4] SLAPSTICK, by *Kurt Vonnegut*. Delacorte Press. $7.95.

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comic—if it is to make good its claims upon our attention. Gravity is at issue as well in *Half a Marriage*,[5] the last novel of Violet Weingarten, who died this summer. Mrs. Weingarten's novel is about a crisis in the marriage of a middle-aged couple, he a lawyer, she a novelist, very much East Side Manhattan of the current day. A novel with more than the legal limit of longeurs—the limit in most states for a novel of less than 300 pages is six—and one that runs out of fuel well before its end, *Half a Marriage* is rather like the kind of movie that is far from satisfactory as art but about which one can nevertheless say that it has its moments. Some of the best moments in the novel are about the figure of the husband, who, in the middle of an affair with a younger woman ("Quite young and beautiful," as he describes her. "Raunchy."), informs his wife: " 'All I know is I don't want to be married right now.' " That is a line precisely expressive of a mentality of a kind that is not in danger of extinction at present.

More interesting, however, is Mrs. Weingarten's heroine, the novelist, most of whose experience seems to have come from reading other people's novels. Considering her own marriage, for example, she notes: "Of course, judging by what I read in other people's novels, there did seem to be something missing [sexually from her marriage]." The names of other novelists and writers, most of them of the second rank and below, play through Mrs. Weingarten's pages: "Something I read Truman Capote does when he eats alone . . ."; mention is made of "the father in Jane Howard's book"; Erica Jong, Philip Roth, Hannah Green, and *Love's Body* are cited as so much of the mental furniture of our heroine, who at one point remarks " 'free,' of course, in the precise Doris Lessing sense." Perhaps here in *Half a Marriage* is a fuller answer to the question raised earlier about who reads such novels: the people who read them are people who have identity crises, go to marriage counselors, have no problem understanding their children's despising them, and are perhaps themselves novelists.

Rosellen Brown's *The Autobiography of My Mother*[6] is set cross town from Violet Weingarten's *Half a Marriage*. But the distance between the two talents, as between the two sections of the city, is considerable. Miss Brown is far and away the most talented novelist considered in this chronicle thus far. She has powers of phrasing, of insight into feeling, of evocation; she has learning and she is, novelistically, ambitious, setting—and bringing off—a difficult section of her novel in a pre-Nazi Germany that she cannot have known firsthand but has to have grasped wholly through imagination and intelligent reading. Rosellen Brown has almost everything a novelist should have except, in *The Autobiography of My Mother,* a real story. Her extremely intelligent book might more accurately have been entitled Two Characters in Search of a Novel.

The two characters, a mother and a daughter, are each remarkable. An old world figure, the mother resembles someone not altogether like the

[5] HALF A MARRIAGE, by *Violet Weingarten*. Knopf. $7.95.
[6] THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MY MOTHER, by *Rosellen Brown*. Doubleday. $7.95.

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late Hannah Arendt, though in a more activist strain: she is a lawyer who specializes in civil libertarian work. European, cerebral, with a mind honed to cut fine distinctions, thinking in an English that makes the requirements of precision that only a well-educated foreigner can bring to the language, she is a most fascinating construction. Early divorced, with no masculine entanglements before or since the end of her marriage, hers is a life devoted to work—and, to a lesser extent, her daughter (much lesser, to hear the daughter tell it). As for the daughter, she is very near to a human disaster. A floater out on the sea called counter-culture, she has lived in hippy squalor, sleeping round, picking up then dropping one or another interest, eventually becoming a professional incompetent, a title which she earns indisputably by having a child out of wedlock by a Trotskyist whose fingers smell of cat food. (A nice touch, that last.) Such are Miss Brown's two characters, mother and daughter—not exactly a page out of the Christmas J. C. Penney Catalogue.

The setting is claustral, as perhaps it should be for female combat; but more than claustral, it is a bit menacing, as the upper-west side of Manhattan can often be. The novel proper begins with the daughter showing up at her mother's legal office with her child. No men of any moment appear in the book. The two women know each other too well, which doesn't make conversation between them any easier; this and the fact that neither is what the other had in mind for a mother or daughter. Many valuable things about women—also about Woman—get said in Miss Brown's pages; and if at times one is inclined to label this a "feminist" novel—an insulting label—it is finally better than that. Yet for all her talent Miss Brown's novel wants a sense of direction. Hers is a book that offers the object lesson that subtle portraiture, keen psychological insight, and splendid writing—rare and blessed things though they are in themselves—are not sufficient to produce a novel of the first class. It is only at the very end of *The Autobiography of My Mother* that, through a twist with a fatal air of contrivance to it, something like a plot emerges. The effect is rather like hearing a joke splendid in the telling capped by a weak punch-line. Still, her novel does make one indisputable point, and this is that Rosellen Brown is a novelist worth reading.

If plot is essential to the novel, the novelist's principal problem with plot is to make the unpredictable seem inevitable. Miss A. G. Mojtabai, alas, solves only half this problem: she makes, in her tightly plotted novel *The 400 Eels of Sigmund Freud,*[7] the predictable seem inevitable. Her engaging title derives from the fact that Freud, when a medical student, wrote a histological paper of some significance in which, to make certain of his conclusions, he went to the trouble of dissecting 400 eels. The setting for her novel is a summer camp of sorts for high school students gifted in the sciences—a camp established by an aging scientist who remains a true believer in the mission of science. To reduce it to type, *The 400 Eels of Sigmund Freud* is what is known as a sensitive novel about youth: carefully

[7] 400 EELS OF SIGMUND FREUD, by *A. G. Mojtabai.* Simon & Schuster. $7.95.

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organized, reasonably well written, and finally more than a little boring. Its boredom derives from its formulations, which are so very pat: youth is clean, age corrupt; the sterile hate the creative; tidiness is incompatible with genius, and so on. The point is not that Miss Mojtabai's formulations may not be true; it is that, novelistically, they are exhausted. Almost as exhausted, one is tempted to say, as that by-now stock figure in modern novels, "the quintessential Jew." Miss Mojtabai's novel has such a character, a QJ; and in fact another character says of him ". . . Isaiah is the quintessential Jew." If a literary census were taken, I think it would show that more quintessential Jews walk the streets of modern novels than essential Jews, or even plain Jews. As one of the last, my feeling when confronted with yet another QJ in yet another novel can be reduced to two words: Enough already!

Miss Mojtabai's novel has the feel of a short story, even though it runs some seventy pages longer than R. K. Narayan's *The Painter of Signs*.[8] The difference is in the feeling of destiny that the latter book provides, whereas the former is about events leading up to a single (if disastrous) incident. One senses this feeling of destiny by the intuition, built into the work, that life somehow goes on for the characters of the novel even after its final sentence. Mr. Narayan achieves much of his art through economy, which he has in masterly measure. His is a prose tailored exactly to the task at hand, a prose without ego:

> He lounged about the Market Road. An arcade of some interesting little shops had developed in an abandoned alley down the road, displaying all kind of trinkets, flashlights, cuff-links, and so forth, most of them being tacitly approved smugglers' outlets for forbidden goods unloaded on deserted coasts. Would it not be nice to write a sign board to declare: SMUGGLERS ARCADE—STRICTLY IMPORTED GOODS. He could design an interesting board for it, in a slightly blue background with a suggestion of the sea. But the traders here were strangers constantly disappearing and reappearing under new names, hence no signboard would be feasible. A signboard pinned things down to a sort of permanency—it gave things an air of being established. That was why he appreciated Daisy's efforts now. That meant she intended to be permanent. At the thought of her, he was conscious of a sudden racing of his pulse. Quiet, he told himself. Time to turn round. He saw what he had come looking for—sunglasses, a stall full of them. He picked up a pair and tried it; in the dark smoked glass he could hardly decipher the face of the shopman, who looked grotesque with his thick lips, square nose, and no chin. Very satisfactory. "What's the price?"
>
> "Fifty rupees . . . ."
>
> "Nonsense, I'll take it for ten."
>
> "It's from Hong Kong—make if fifteen."
>
> "Twelve," and the bargain was over.

[8] THE PAINTER OF SIGNS, by *R. K. Narayan*. Viking. $8.95.

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Such is Mr. Narayan's facility—felicity is more accurate—that one reads fully two-thirds into his novel before one realizes one hasn't a clue to what his principal character looks like or even how old he is, when one gets the first scrap of information of this kind about him: "He was an adult past thirty . . . . " Charm is another of Mr. Narayan's qualities, and it is not alone the charm of foreignness, though this is sometimes an aid: "Bless your enlightened mind. May your sideburns flourish! thought Raman." Rather it is the charm of careful storytelling, an act, one realizes when reading Mr. Narayan, not alone of art but of art compounded with consideration. It does not detract that Mr. Narayan has a true subject in *The Painter of Signs:* the incursion of the modern on the traditional, the perennial Indian subject. His is a comedy that cuts deep yet does not bruise. One of the nice things about having settled morals, Virginia Woolf once remarked, is that at least one knows what to laugh at. Also, she might have added, what to cry about. R. K. Narayan knows both these things. He is a novelist with a point of view, a moral center, which, though widely tolerant, is firmly anchored. Of his principal character, he notes: "He had a general philosophy of books—all the classification that mattered was good books and bad books." One lays down *The Painter of Signs* with no hesitation about in which class it goes.

In a discussion of the historical novel in *The New Yorker* this past autumn the aggressively learned Dr. George Steiner failed to mention the name of Marguerite Yourcenar, the French writer who is not only its foremost practitioner but who brings to the genre scholarship and imagination such as to raise it to a position of art. With only a few exceptions—Robert Graves's *I, Claudius,* John Williams' more recent *Augustus*—historical fiction dependably degenerates into a costume ball, at which feeble invention waltzes with false fact. In the work of Marguerite Yourcenar nothing of the kind results. One can turn to nearly any page in her rightly recognized classic *Memoirs of Hadrian* to find evidence of a mind of the first order. Here, for example, is the aging Hadrian on the subject of diet:

> Do not do me the injustice to take me for a mere ascetic; an operation which is performed two or three times a day, and the purpose of which is to sustain life, surely merits all our care. To eat a fruit is to welcome into oneself a fair living object, which is alien to us but is nourished and protected like us by the earth; it is to consume a sacrifice wherein we sustain ourselves at the expense of things. I have never bitten into a chunk of army bread without marveling that this coarse and heavy concoction can transform itself into blood and warmth, and perhaps into courage. Alas, why does my mind, even in its best days, never possess but a particle of the assimilative powers of the body?

In *The Abyss,*[9] her most recent novel to appear here in yet another excellent English translation by Grace Frick, Mme. Yourcenar's canvas is even

[9] THE ABYSS, by *Marguerite Yourcenar.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $10.00.

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wider than in *Memoirs of Hadrian*—if one can conceive of a canvas wider than the Roman Empire before the decline. The novel is set in 16th century Europe, its intellectual climate is "the cold ardor of the Reformation," and its principal character, a physician, alchemist, and philosopher named Zeno, is a man guilty his life long of the crime of "audacity of mind." Mme. Yourcenar writes: "For nearly half a century Zeno had used his mind, wedge-like, to enlarge, as best he could, the breaks in the wall which on all sides confines us. The cracks were widening, or rather, it seemed that the wall was slowly losing its solidity, though it still remained opaque, as if it were a wall of smoke and not of stone." In *Memoirs of Hadrian* Mme. Yourcenar's talent seemed, appropriate to her novel's Roman context, akin to that of a sculptor; in *The Abyss* it more nearly approximates that of the painter, or rather of various painters. Whole passages seem to have slid off the canvases of Bosch, of Goya, of Rembrandt. Here is Brueghel:

> The traveler stopped in the square to buy a loaf of bread. The doors of the burghers' houses were beginning to open. At one of them a pink-cheeked matron in a crisp linen wimple loosed a poodle to let it run gaily about; it sniffed the grass before stopping suddenly to settle into the contrite pose all dogs assume when relieving themselves, then bounded off again to its play. A troop of children passed, chattering on their way to school, chubby and merry as robins in their bright attire . . . . A cat stole by, returning home with his prey, the limp claws of a bird protruding from his mouth. From the cook shop came the savory odor of pies and roast meat, mingling with the stale smell from the butcher shop nearby; the butcher's wife stood rinsing her bloodstained threshold with great buckets of water. Outside the town was the customary gallows, raised on a grassy knoll, but the body hanging there had been exposed so long to sun, wind, and rain as to have almost acquired the gentle aspect of old abandoned things; a friendly breeze played through its faded rages. A company of bowmen were setting forth to shoot wood thrush, hearty burghers all, who clapped each other on the back as they exchanged jocosities; each of them had a pouch slung over his shoulder that would soon contain those small, warm parcels of life which an instant before had been singing in the open sky. Zeno hastened his step.

Poetry, thought, learning are the ingredients out of which *The Abyss* has been made. Literary ambition has been added, for there is very little that Mme. Yourcenar does not attempt in this novel, and almost all of what she does attempt she brings off handsomely. She ends her novel describing death itself, which is the height of ambition in an imaginative writer, and does it persuasively. Marguerite Yourcenar's novels are a reminder that novelists are under the obligation to be very intelligent, a quality that, in America, at least in recent decades, they cannot be said precisely to have specialized in.

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Paula Fox and Richard Yates are two novelists of the kind who tend to get short shrift in America nowadays. Neither their lives nor their work provide any handle for publicity. They are not ethnic, nor youthful, nor scandalous, nor striking out to be "major." They are merely—some "merely"!—very good writers. Although one of Miss Fox's novels, *Desperate Characters,* has been made into a movie, and although Mr. Yates's most recent novel has been "picked up" (a nice phrase, suggesting the whimsical arbitrariness of such things) by the Book-of-the-Month Club, one cannot help but believe that their value is not widely appreicated, nor is it soon likely to be.

Neither Mr. Yates nor Miss Fox is noted for the cheeriness of his or her creations. Both have a taste, a positive appetite, for desolation. Between them in their two most recent novels—Miss Fox's *The Widow's Children*[10] and Mr. Yates's *The Easter Parade*[11]—they can get up a cast of characters such as to make much other modern fiction seem like Sesame Street: impotent lovers, sadly aging homosexuals, blocked poets, alcoholic women, wife beaters, cowards of all sorts, sizes, and sexes, and an editor who experiences a tinge of nausea at the sight of a printed page. Not many laughs here.

If Miss Fox and Mr. Yates have these affinities, each is, as a prose writer, quite different from the other. *The Widow's Children* takes place within less than twenty-four hours, *The Easter Parade* stretches out over half a century, though each is about family breakdown. Miss Fox's prose is propelled by the pressure of reaching for insight about feelings and relationships. "One needn't go along with shows," a brother in her novel remarks. "What do you think manners are?" his sister responds. Mr. Yates's specialty is the clean narrative line, with the occasional sharp jab: "Then suddenly it was 1955, and she was thirty years old." Mr. Yates's characters are worn down by life, Miss Fox's are shattered by it. Both have the keenest sense of the world's indignities: in *The Easter Parade,* the principal character, paying by check for her mother's funeral, is asked for her driver's license for identification; in *The Widow's Children,* one character asks after someone, "Well, how is he, apart from dying?" To the assets of craft—of prose and plot and point of view—Miss Fox and Mr. Yates add human sympathy. Strange times we live in, that we have sometimes to remind ourselves that this is what the novel at its best has always been about.

[10] THE WIDOW'S CHILDREN, by *Paula Fox*. E. P. Dutton. $8.95.
[11] THE EASTER PARADE, by *Richard Yates*. Delacorte Press. $7.95.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Su Cosa Mi Cosa; or, Busy Busy Busy

On October 20, 1663 Elizabeth Pepys sat in a coach outside a London shop waiting for her husband; and while Pepys

> was in Kirtons shop, a fellow came to offer kindness or force to my wife in the coach. But she refusing, he went away, after the coachman had struck him and he the coachman. So I being called, went thither; and the fellow coming out again of a shop, I did give him a good cuff or two on the chops; and seeing him not oppose me, I did give him another; at last, I found him drunk, of which I was glad and so left him and home; and so to my office a while and so home to supper and to bed.[1]

"No other diarist lays himself so bare as Pepys does," declares Professor Matthews in his Introduction, reminding the rest of us how equivocal we are, implicating us against our will but for our own good in the bare facts of the all too human. Isn't Pepys our patsy and double (hypocrite readers!), doesn't his "passion for microscopic observation of himself as he actually was" end by exposing us all as we actually are? Sometimes we aren't much. The masher's way with a lady (that was no lady, that was my wife), the way of a man with a maid (chamber-, bar-, upstairs-, downstairs-), is "kindness or force"—if kindness doesn't work the alternative is naturally force—which are the two sides of a man's mettle (brass), because according to Pepys *nulla puella negat* though occasionally for appearance' sake she balks a little (sooner or later she can't say no: e.g. the lady in the coach doesn't rage or swoon, merely "refuses" and summons her handy husband; maybe next time . . .). Chivalry is dead and the Pepysian *coup de grâce* is that gratuitous cuff on the chops, which he delivers when he's sure the masher won't strike back: who else would not only let it fly at the moment but indite it with unembarrassed deliberateness hours or days later, and note besides how invigorating it is to discover that one's adversary is drunk (and therefore *can't* strike back)? Whatever the moral questions that keep popping up, editors understand all and forgive all because the Pepys of their dreams is Everyman except "incredibly honest":

> Much of the matter that is printed for the first time in the present edition might be labelled pornographic and [Pepys is often troubled with wind, one onset of which he describes at considerable length in

[1] THE DIARY OF SAMUEL PEPYS. A new and complete transcription edited by *Robert Latham* and *William Matthews*. University of California Press. Vols. I-IX. $88.00. These volumes include the full text of the Diary. There will be two more volumes: X (A Companion) and XI (Index).

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> pungent detail] scatological. Since most of it is written in Pepys's own *lingua franca* and hedged with shorthand and dog-Latin devices, it may be judged to deal with behaviour that Pepys himself thought shameful. Yet his presentation of this record of his moral deviations is clinical rather than moral or erotic; much of it reads like material for a scientific report on sexual behavior in the human male. That Pepys included it, although ashamed, is the most evident testimony to the full objective reporting, the scientific outlook, the Baconianism that went into the diary and the manner in which it was reported.

But Pepys won't be caught so easily. Why not infer that not just the *lingua franca* but the whole diary—private, secret, written in shorthand, locked away from prying eyes—"deal[s] with behaviour that Pepys himself thought shameful"? Or who knows, perhaps the lingo is just a device for indicating something rich and strange, i.e. the sexy parts, so that when Pepys wants a quick charge he can look them up by skimming for word-clusters characteristic of the lingo, and shame has nothing to do with it: after all, when his sexual relations with his wife take a turn for the better, he uses it to record even those ("Waked betimes, and lay long hazendo doz vezes con mi moher con grande pleasure to me and ella"); and, for anyone who bothered to crack the simple shorthand, this mostly "Spanish" pidgin is so elementary and so peppered with—intentionally eye-catching?—giveaways ("I only did hazer her para tocar my prick con her hand, which did hazer me hazer"[2]) that either Pepys is ashamed past the need for concealment (he *needs* to be found out and humiliated!) or he isn't as ashamed as he ought to be for perpetrating such a witless exercise. Anyhow Pepys doesn't begin to use it till far along in the diary, years after his "moral deviations" have become so inextricable from the pattern of his daily life—like the man in Mark Twain's story who falls into a carpet-making machine and gets woven into the carpet—that dalliances and curds and cream and a shilling tip to Nell who lets him rub her thing with his thing and a salmon-pie in the nick of time for sending on to his wife in the country can all be looped together continuously in the crazy carpet:

> . . . thence I back to the King's playhouse and there saw *The Virgin Martyr*—and heard the music that I like so well; and entended to have seen Knipp, but I let her alone; and having there done, went to Mrs. Pierce's back again where she was, and there I found her asleep on a pallet in the dark, where yo did poner mi manos under her jupe and tocar su cosa and waked her; that is, Knipp. And so to talk, and by and by did eat some Curds and cream and thence away home; and it being night, I did walk in the dusk up and down, round through our garden,

[2] As the two passages in parenthesis suggest, the operative word of Pepys's pidgin is "hazer," which means "make" or "do" and is used for a range of compulsive, brutal, insulting, and merely ejaculatory sexual activity. The second passage proceeds to the payoff: "and so to a milliner at the corner shop going into Bishopsgate and Leadenhall-street, and there did give her eight pair of gloves, and so dismissed her."

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> over Tower Hill, and so through Crutched Friars, three or four times; and once did meet Mercer and another pretty lady, but being surprized, I could say little to them, though I had an opportunity of pleasing myself with them [?]; but left them, and then I did see our Nell, Payne's daughter, and her yo did desear venga after migo, and so ella did seque me to Tower-hill to our back entry there that comes upon the degres entrant into nostra garden; and there, ponendo the key in the door, yo tocar sus mamelles con mi mano and su cosa with mi cosa et yo did darla a shilling; and so parted, and yo home to put up things against tomorrow's carrier for my wife; and among others, a very fine salmon-pie sent me by Mr. Steventon, W. Hewer's uncle; and so to bed.

This is as idyllic as the gallivanting ever gets, very likely because the women here aren't the low types with whom he dares to push his luck. It's the latter, of course, who provoke the Pepysian unbuttoning that obliges editors to clear their throats and emphasize the "clinical" and "Baconian" qualities of the sexy parts; but mere laymen might be inclined to substitute such epithets as "humorless," "mechanical," probably "anesthetic," possibly "sadistic," and to notice how readily the tone modulates into something like megalomania. Once Pepys discards his Puritan hang-ups and stops invoking God whenever he masturbates in church during a Sunday sermon or "spends" with one or another of his faceless, bodiless, mindless, unimaginable women ("I finding myself, both head and breast, in great pain. . . . It is a cold, which God Almighty in justice did give me while I sat lewdly sporting with Mrs. Lane the other day with the broken window in my neck"), once he has the habit, there's no limit to his self-assurance and his sense of impunity. Thus, as a pretext for visiting the man's wife, he befriends a carpenter at one of the naval shipyards (Pepys is a Principal Officer of the Navy Board): "After dinner I found occasion of sending him abroad; and there alone avec elle je tentoy à faire ce que je voudrais, et contre sa force je le faisoy, bien que pas à mon contentment" (i.e. against her physical resistance I did what I would, though not to my satisfaction). Another time with Mrs. Bagwell "I had sa compagnie, though with a great deal of difficulty; néanmoins, enfin je avais ma volonté d'elle"; but the next day he complains of a "mighty pain in my forefinger of my left hand, from a strain that it received last night in struggling avec la femme que je mentioned yesterday." Or, in a coach with another woman and her husband, "did prender su mano with some little violence" and forces her to masturbate him (under a laprobe? with her husband sitting on the other side of her? Pepys never brings up such trifles) "all the way home," where once they arrive he is surprised to detect that she seems out of sorts:

> . . . there she did seem a little ill, but I did take several opportunities afterward para besar la [to kiss her], and so goodnight. They gone, I to my chamber, and with my brother and wife did Number all my books in my closet and took a list of their names; which pleases me mightily, and is a jobb I wanted much to have done. Then to supper and to bed.

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Or plays the rôle of rough trade with his barmaid and shopgirl regulars:

> So to Westminster, where to the Swan; and there I did fling down the fille there upon the chair and did tocar her thigh with my hand; at which she begin to cry out, so I left off and drank, and away to the Hall and thence to Mrs. Martin's to bespeak some linen, and there yo did hazer algo with ella and drank and away. . . . So by coach home, and there find our pretty girl, Willet, come, brought by Mr. Batelier; and she is very pretty, and so grave as I never saw little thing in my life.

That unaccustomed touch of character and interest is really there in Pepys's first sight of Deb Willet, and commentators have always been grateful for the opportunity to carry on about the intensity and pathos of Pepys's involvement with her; but in fact the first sight of her remains the most moving, Pepys's appetite grinds everything down to its usual quick inventory, and his emotional repertoire never expands:

> . . . going down Holburn-hill by the Conduit, I did see Deb on foot going up the hill; I saw her, and she me, but she made no stop, but seemed unwilling to speak to me; so I away on, but then stopped and light and after her, and overtook her at the end of Hosier-lane in Smithfield; and without standing in the street, desired her to fallow me, and I led her into a little blind alehouse within the walls; and there she and I alone fell to talk and besar la and tocar su mamelles; but she mighty coy ["quiet," "unresponsive"], and I hope modest ["virtuous"]; but however, though with great force, did hazer ella con su hand para tocar mi thing, but ella was in great pain para be brought para it. I did give her in a paper 20*s*, and we did agree para meet again in the Hall at Westminster on Monday next; and so, giving me great hopes by her carriage that she continues modest and honest, we did there part. . . .

Pepys is sentimental about those of his women who not only have a virtuous look but, before he lays them out, put up a desperate fight; he tends, understandably enough, to worry about the risks to other people's virtue while in the very act of assaulting it "with some little violence" or "with great force." Vice is what happens to other people: what he himself seeks is "pleasure" (he often reproaches himself for "my love of pleasure") while others are the subjects or the objects of "vice": "how rude some of the young gallants of the town are become, to go into people's arbors where there are not men, and almost force the women—which troubled me, to see the confidence of the vice of the age"; but, on a typical "Lords day," Pepys

> turned into St. Dunstan's church, where I hear an able sermon of the Minister of the place. And stood by a pretty, modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand and the body; but she would not, but got

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> further and further from me, and at last I could perceive her to take pins out of her pocket to prick me if I should touch her again; which seeing, I did forbear, and was glad I did espy her design. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid in a pew close to me . . .

and so on. Vice, however, is something else again and mustn't be left unmoralized: Mrs. Martin, his Westminster Hall regular, having married the wrong man, i.e. not the one Pepys urged on her for some special conveniences to Pepys in the arrangement,

> begins a sad story how her husband, as I feared, proves not worth a farding, and that she is with child and undone if I do not get him a place. I had my pleasure here of her; and she, like an impudent jade, depends upon my kindness to her husband; but I will have no more to do with her, let her brew as she hath baked—seeing she would not take my counsel about Hawly.

True, in this instance Pepys's love of pleasure wins out over his moral indignation, and soon and often he returns to the Hall and takes his position again at the old stand, sometimes "backward" for "convenience," sometimes "devante" for variety. Impudent jade or modest maid: su cosa mi cosa. Pepys thinks of himself as a connoisseur of women, by playing the field he is faithful to them all; he piques himself—and editors drop like flies with delight at the vividness of the phrasing—on the "strange slavery that I stand in to beauty": i.e. to any moher's cosa against which, having contended con mucho pièce de résistance, yo did rub mi cosa para hazer in mi hand. Women, on the other hand, are unreliable and fickle even when not yet vicious: *la donna è mobile*, as Pepys might have reflected: "no passion in a woman can be lasting long," as he does reflect, having joked with a woman and made her laugh after she enters the office solemn-faced to ask his help about housing for her family; and, "the best instance of a woman's falseness in the world," Mrs. Martin's sister is shameless enough to

> come home all blubbering and swearing against one Captain Vandena, a Dutchman of the Rhenish wine-house, that pulled her into a stable by the Dog tavern and there did tumble her and toss her; calling him all the rogues and toads in the world, when she knows that ella hath suffered me to do anything with her a hundred times.

The logic here, though murky, seems to go as follows: If a woman gives way to any one man, doesn't put up a desperate fight against him, indeed "suffers" him to do and do with her at his will and pleasure, then she is by such evidence bursting (and in some sense *obligated*) to be done to and done to by all the men in the world.

Other people, not just women, keep disappointing him, "vexing" him, they seldom fail to hurt Pepys more than he hurts them: "I having from

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my wife and the maids complaints made of the boy, I called him up and with my whip did whip him till I was not able to stir"; "I took a broom and basted her till she cried extremely, which made me vexed"; "Up betimes; and with my salt Eele went down in the parler, and there got my boy and did beat him till I was fain to take breath two or three times"; "became angry and boxed my boy when he came, that I do hurt my Thumb so much, that I was not able to stir all the day after and in great pain." Or consider such an altitude of injured delicacy as this:

> coming homeward again, saw my door and hatch open, left so by Luce our cookmaid; which so vexed me, that I did give her a kick in our entry and offered a blow at her, and was seen doing so by Sir W. Penn's footboy, which did vex me to the heart because I know he will be telling their family of it, though I did put on presently a very pleasant face to the boy and spoke kindly to him as one without passion, so as it may be he might not think I was angry; but yet I was troubled at it.

Small wonder that when in a fit of temper he pulls his wife's nose or blacks her eye, he can't bear to think that people will *know* (he's a very private man), and is "vexed at my heart to think what I had done, for she was forced to lay a poultice or something to her eye all day, and is black—and the people of the house observed it."

Although if worse comes to worst he can usually beat her up, Pepys is well matched with his wife, above all after she catches him *in flagrante* at home under her very nose: "my wife, coming up suddenly, did find me imbracing the girl con my hand sub su coats; and endeed, I was with my main [i.e. Fr. "hand"] in her cunny." What follows is the most interesting episode in the diary. Pepys is the little boy caught playing doctor with the little girl next door; Elizabeth is Big Mama, a volcano of latent and sometimes actual hysteria (one night she advances toward him with red-hot tongs), she is enigmatic and implacable, she is demanding (especially in bed: "I have lain with my moher"—what a difference a "t" makes—"as a husband more times since this falling-out," he writes three weeks later, "then in I believe twelve months before—and with more pleasure to her then I think in all the time of our marriage before"), she is Argus-eyed (insists he have a full-time keeper! herself or his young assistant, either or both of whom must accompany him whenever he leaves the house, e.g. for appointments at Whitehall where he discusses Navy business with the Duke of York or the King), levitating at last to an ecstasy of omniscience from which she denounces him for having evil *dreams* and passes the night (if Pepys's tangled way of putting it doesn't allow some doubt) keeping a judicial hand ready to check on his unconscious erections: "My wife mighty peevish in the morning about my lying unquietly a-nights, and she will have it that it is a late practice, from my evil thoughts in my dreams; and I do often find that in my dreams she doth lay her hand upon my cockerel to observe what she can."

Professor Matthews has the presumptuousness to rate Pepys with

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Shakespeare and more particularly with Chaucer, "of all English writers, perhaps the only one who is his equal in gusto. . . . Who else among English writers has Pepys's enthusiasm for everyday people, everyday life, or his habit of judging everything he liked the best that ever there was?" Pepys does frequently express enthusiasm for one thing and another, for a good dinner he prides himself on giving to friends and eminent acquaintances (especially once he is prosperous enough to be able to show off a handsome house and excellent plate), for music, for dancing; and he can even make a few qualifications and wax philosophical:

> we to dancing and then to a supper of some French dishes (which yet did not please me) and then to dance and sing; and mighty merry we were till about 11 or 12 at night, with mighty great content in all my company; and I did, as I love to do, enjoy myself in my pleasure, as being the heighth of what we take pains for and can hope for in this world—and therefore to be enjoyed while we are young and capable of these joys.

But which dishes he objected to, or who did what at the party, or how the guests responded to one another, or almost whether anybody but Pepys was there—such matters scarcely ever intrude into the text: Pepys's "pleasure"—as when he is with his women—radiates an aura of self-satisfaction blinding enough to fade out everything in the neighborhood. Pepys is enthusiastic about plays too, goes to them as often as by surrealistic chains of reasoning[3] he can neutralize his Puritan sense of guilt about going, considers himself a connoisseur of plays (on one occasion sits by an acquaintance "who understands and loves a play as well as I, and I love him for it"), but his capsule comments don't inspire a corresponding enthusiasm in the reader: *Romeo and Juliet* is "the worst [play] that ever I heard in my life"; *Sir Martin Mar-all* is "the most entire piece of Mirth . . . that certainly was ever writ"; *The Siege of Rhodes* is "certainly the best poem ever wrote"; *The Adventures of Five Hours* is "the best play I ever saw" (in comparison with which *Othello*, "which I have heretofore esteemed a mighty good play, . . . seems a mean thing"); *Twelfth Night* is "but a silly play and not relating at all to the name or day"; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is "the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life." One might as well be reading the movie reviews in the New York *Times*.

[3] For example: "after dinner by coach to White-hall, thinking to have met at a Comittee of Tanger; but nobody being there but my Lord Rutherford, he would needs carry me and another scotch lord to a play; and so we saw, coming late, part of *The Generall*. . . . And here I must confess breach of a vow [not to go to theaters more often than once a month] in appearance, but I not desiring it but against my will, and my oath being to go neither at my own charge nor another's, as I had done by becoming liable to give them another, as I am to Sir W. Penn and Mr. Creed. But here I neither know which of them paid for me; nor, if I did, am I obliged ever to return the like, or did it by desire or with any willingness. So that with a safe conscience, I do think my oath is not broke, and judge God Almighty will not think it otherwise."

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Pepys isn't like Chaucer, rather he's like those of Chaucer's characters who are authorized and camouflaged by a vocation: the Pardoner, the Friar, the Summoner, the Merchant, the Man of Law—

> Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,
> And yet he semed bisier than he was.

Chaucer's Man of Law could be Samuel Pepys, Clerk of the Acts of the Navy Board, member of the Fishery Corporation, Treasurer of the Tangier Committee, ubiquitous civil servant trusted and consulted by the Duke of York and the King, confidant to the Earl of Sandwich and Sir William Coventry and Sir George Carteret and Lord Crew, Fellow of the newly established Royal Society, in the prime of his young manhood (he is twenty-six at the beginning of the decade covered by the diary) busy busy busy doing his jobs and maintaining his "interest" with all the right people and accumulating "profits" (bribes) on the side and enjoying convivial dinners and outings almost nightly, yet not so busy that he doesn't have time for a secret life that behind the perfect competence of his rôle grins like an idiot, chasing after housemaids and barmaids and subordinates' wives and petitioners' daughters up and down stairs and all over the shadier sections of town, gorging on awful plays, planning the definitive treatise on the theory of music though he still hasn't got round to asking somebody the difference between concords and discords, trying without luck to follow the lectures and comprehend the experiments at the Royal Society, thrilled by scientific books he can't make sense of (like Boyle's *Hydrostatics*) on the way to becoming an intellectual (in his term, a "virtuoso"), skeptical about Court gossip but (like Chaucer's old carpenter in *The Miller's Tale* who falls for a cock-and-bull story about the Flood) delighted to get the real dope on the Ark from a book by a Dr. Wilkins, "wherein he doth give a very good account thereof, showing how few the number of the several species of beasts and fowls were that were to be in the arke, and that there was room enough for them and their food and dung; which doth please me mightily—and is much beyond whatever I heard of that subject. And so to bed." The world is his cosa, and with some little violence all the animals fit inside.

Chaucer is the touchstone all right, not because he and Pepys are soul-brothers but because Chaucer is the only writer whose subject is the split between "gusto" and consciousness, the fact that vitality and consciousness ordinarily exist at cross-purposes, that each ordinarily functions at the expense of the other, that vitality is the fundamental good and yet can be incompatible with goodness—Chaucer's "moral vertu," which is the summit of consciousness. Chaucer knows exactly how marvelously vital such characters as the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath are, how full of shrewdness and truth, how interesting and indispensable and generous when their interest isn't at stake (as when Pepys spins out his marvelously detailed account of the Great Fire of London: "a piece of glass of Mercer's chapel in the street, where much more was, so melted and buckled with

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the heat of the fire, like parchment"), how exhilaratingly sure of themselves, and yet what horrors they would be to confront in the flesh or live with, what freaks and monsters, what liars and moral idiots, how gigantic and invulnerable, how abstract and human. Here is Pepys's Vitality head to head with the Prick of Conscience, on a field of Consciousness Dormant: At his bookseller's he looks into a dirty book which seems to him "the most bawdy, lewd book that ever I saw . . . so that I was ashamed of reading in it"; three weeks later, "to my bookseller's, and there stayed an hour and bought that idle, roguish book, *L'escholle des Filles*; which I have bought in plain binding . . . because I resolve, as soon as I have read it, to burn it"; the next day (Sunday of course), "I to my chamber, where I did read through *L'escholle des Filles*; a lewd book, but what doth me no wrong to read for information sake (but it did hazer my prick para stand all the while, and una vez to decharger); and after I had done it, I burned it, that it might not be among my books to my shame." How cute and *all-zu-menschlich*! chortle the professors, striking a conscious blow for gusto.

There's nobody here but us monsters. For Pepys the Puritan and churchy jerk-off and mad secret fucker and ambitious bureaucrat and lunatic playgoer, Charles II is the ultimate monster—A King and No King—and a wit besides. By his indolence and quite unsecret profligacy Charles has managed to disillusion the populace (and Pepys) in record time and make them yearn for the good old Cromwellian repressions. In March 1668, for instance, there is serious and prolonged rioting in the London streets by mobs of apprentices, who indicate their temper by "pulling down of bawdy-houses, which is one of the great grievances of the nation. To which the King made a very poor, cold, insipid answer: 'Why, why do they go to them, then?' and that was all, and had no mind to go on with the discourse." Pepys, who fancies himself a connoisseur of sermons, no doubt intends the parallel with truth and Pilate; but the King is speaking for Pepys, and neither speaks for Chaucer. Gusto isn't the last word.

Pepys stands up for public order and lies low for private expedience, and many nights before he goes beddy-bye he makes lists of unfinished business that don't distinguish between the two: "so to supper and to bed—vexed at two or three things—*viz.* that my wife's watch [her new timepiece, not her surveillance over him] proves so bad as it doth—the ill state of the office and Kingdom's business—at the charge which my mother's death for mourning will bring me when all paid [his mother had died the week before]." Pepys didn't much care for his mother, he had wept for his brother's death, surely he will weep for his wife's and father's deaths later. Still, Death the Leveler reduces the number of items (categories don't matter) to be ordered and expedited, as when the Lord Treasurer is about to give up the ghost:

> Sir Ph. Warwick doth please himself like a good man, to tell some of the good ejaculacions of my Lord Treasurer concerning the little worth of this world, to buy it with so much pain, and other things fit for a dying man. So finding no business likely to be done here for Tanger, I having

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> a warrant for tallies to be signed, I away to the New Exchange and there stayed a little and then to a looking-glass shop to consult about covering the wall in my closet over my chimney, which is darkish, with looking-glasses . . .

and then and then and then and then "and then to bed, resolving to rise betimes tomorrow to write fair the report."

There is a single exception in the diary: William Coventry, Secretary to the Lord High Admiral, the only person whom Pepys loves, admires, is undeviatingly loyal to, and indeed may be said to reverence from beginning to end. Moreover, on the evidence Pepys gives, it's clear that Coventry deserves Pepys's near-idolatry and it's equally clear that he not only trusts but likes and esteems Pepys:

> and then at noon rise [from a Navy Board meeting] and I with Mr. Coventry down to the waterside, talking; wherein I see so much goodness and endeavours of doing the King service that I do more and more admire him. It being the greatest trouble to man, he says, in the world, to see not only in the Navy, but in the greatest matters of State, where he can lay his finger upon the soare (meaning this man's faults, and this man's office the fault lies in), and yet dare or can not remedy matters.

Pepys's most courageous public act is recorded near the end of the diary—visiting Coventry in the Tower, where he has been committed by the King after being goaded by the Duke of Buckingham into a challenge. Coventry is too conspicuously strong and good to survive in such a government—he seems to have been the only effective, hard-working, brave, far-sighted, and incorruptible official in the inner circle of government policy (Burnet's *History* sums him up as "a man of the finest and the best temper that belonged to the court")—whereas Pepys survives wars and revolutions because he is useful to everybody and not least to himself. Pepys must have been a charmer as well as a useful functionary; at any rate Coventry was charmed and convinced. But Coventry didn't read the diary.

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VERNON YOUNG

Poetry Chronicle

"I, a gentleman. . . ."

AS EARLY AS THE 7TH CENTURY, B.C., a poet included in the Shih Ching (a Confucian collection of the earliest Chinese poems) expressed the enduring comprehension (we would call it Classical) for which Chinese poetry was for some thousands of years to be distinguished: the recognition of his own nature in a universe which, while mysterious, was *there*, outside him, a universe of appearances, sufficient for contemplation and from which, as a man and a mind, he felt separated, with no undue desire to merge with it, to become a salmon or a waterfall; with no anxiety to transcend it by denying its mundane existence.

. . . .
Neither am I an eagle, a falcon,
That can flap and soar up to heaven;
Nor am I a sturgeon, a snout-fish,
That can plunge to hide in the deep.

On the mountains there are brackens,
In the swampgrounds, red thorns.
I, a gentleman, have made the song
In order to release my sorrows.
(Tr. C. H. Wang)[1]

In the ensuing centuries more poets than not have made songs to release their sorrows. Few have been gentlemen. Some eighteen hundred years after the anonymous poet of the Ching, the career of Yang Wan-Li, a Sung master of "colloquial" verse, will serve as well as many before and after him, to illustrate the generic disposition, the generic fate of the Chinese poet-official under the earlier dynasties. An important qualification for candidacy in the civil service was *the art of composing poetry*. But the primary object of the poet was to govern well; poetry, while it might be an aesthetic ornament, was the distillation of the poet's ethical convictions. He wrote poetry in order to *give advice*.

If you read the biographies of all the poets (140) included in this latest and fattest of Chinese anthologies, you will understand why so many poems of the traditional order are retrospective, nostalgic, disillusioned.

[1] Quoted from SUNFLOWER SPLENDOR: 3000 Years of Chinese Poetry, edited by *Wu-Chi-Liu* and *Irving Yucheng Lo*. Anchor. $6.95 paperback. A compact introduction explains the intricacy of Chinese verse; there is an excellent Bibliography and ninety useful pages of "Background on Poets and Poems."

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Yang Wan-Li, one of the hundred-and-forty, (simultaneously featured in an individual volume),[2] indelibly himself, echoes the characteristic path of the poet-in-office. Yang's first post is that of financial administrator, his last (not eminent): an assistant commissioner of transportation. Like our Renaissance courtiers and bishops, the Chinese Imperial poet is a hostage to fortune; he mounts the rungs of favor until slandered by a rival, or until his Emperor is deposed (or is momentarily out of temper at an indiscretion of the poet); then crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight; he is banished, or he retires huffily, to a "remote province" (always scenic!) where he lives out his rheumatic years in a rainswept pavilion, surviving with no excessive discontent on a cup of rice, a fish-roe and a bowl of tea per day. Such was the fate of Yang Wan-Li (1127–1206), ailing and amiable, with an unfading eye (and an unfailing ear) for transient beauty, rendered so breathingly in Jonathan Chaves' translations that we feel we might go and visit him somewhere tomorrow.

> Just as I'm feeling most depressed
> a strange thing happens to me—
> a breeze blows through the northern door
> and past the southern window,
> past the southern window,
> wafting to me
> the fragrance of young orchids.
>
> . . . .
> I listen and listen, until the dawn.
> All my life I have heard rain,
> and I am an old man;
> but now for the first time I understand
> the sound of spring rain
> on the river at night.
> (from two poems, p. 103 and 107)

My personal affection for Chinese poetry derives from an attachment, probably impure, to appearance, to "that which being seen pleases"; it gratifies me that these sages, complaining as they do of the vanity of wishes, the ingratitude of man, the inclemency of time, never in their age despise, like the neo-Platonist, an earth on which their tenure is fatally diminishing; they seem not prompted to 'rise above it' . . . . Wandering among mists and waterfalls, the Chinese mind is nonetheless categorical, complacent, when compared with that of the Hindu. I doubt that the character of Jayanta Mahapatra's sad and serpentine poetry[3] can be

[2] HEAVEN MY BLANKET, EARTH MY PILLOW: Poems from Sung-Dynasty China, by *Yang Wan-Li*. Trans. by Jonathan Chaves and illustrated with Chinese ink drawings. Weatherhill. $7.95.

[3] A RAIN OF RITES, by *Jayanta Mahapatra*. University of Georgia Press. $7.50; $3.95 paperback.

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adequately accounted for by the double circumstance that their creator is twentieth-century and *writes in English*. (He has never been out of India!) The manner of apprehension in his wonderful, sensate poems inevitably brings to the tongue the word, "sophistication." His psychology is at once more historical, more anxious, more involuted than that of any Chinese poet, old or modern, known to me. Evident in every cadence is the long over-ripening of a sardonic wisdom, the tired consciousness of too many beginnings—the ordeal of Samsāra (and I would guess that he has dined on Eliot!):

"When we learned dumbly to grow,
we felt of ourselves abandoned in the wilds, in things not real,
full of the mysterious fog that excites the shadows of the spirit."
("India")

"We all want to find the man who can rise out of his rite.
And yet we are the ones who'll never let ourselves out,
who hang here and there like decorations on the walls
of our cries."
("Now When We Think of Compromise")

Mahapatra consistently reveals a grinding ambivalence towards the burdens of custom and revolving time with which his fellowmen are laden, sanctified, impeded, while indelibly evoking an India I recall from a glimpse in my youth: to me, then, only an exotic chaos, of ". . . bicycles, buses, idling bulls; / a whole religion framed by the land . . . Every man, every beast, trapped, dead in his own sleep . . . ruined leprous shells, leaning against one another . . . The gods casually breezing through the air, among bones."

A man does not mean anything.
But the place.
Sitting on the riverbank throwing pebbles
into the muddy current,
a man becomes the place.
Even that simple enough thing
. . . .
("Somewhere, My Man")

Such fragments are but hints of the style that conveys the poet's melancholy overview; they tell you nothing of his command of integrated form. Here is a whole poem of another order (i.e. not panoramic or in the plural voice).

It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.
The fisherman said: will you have her, carelessly,
trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words

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sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.

I followed him across the sprawling sands,
my mind thumping in the flesh's sling.
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in.
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed
at the froth his old nets had dragged up from the seas.

In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound.
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls.
Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.

I heard him say: my daughter, she's just turned fifteen . . .
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wile.
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.
("Hunger")

With what art the transitive or parenthetical image corroborates the sexual thrust which is the sombre subject: "I saw his white bone thrash *his eyes*"—"*sprawling sands*"—"*my mind thumping*"—"his body clawed/ at the froth"—"opened like a wound"—"an oil lamp splayed the hours." Imposing out of all proportion to their relatively scant number and to the cultural remoteness of their author, these poems should inveigle anyone who professes a passion for the music of English. Few contemporary poems in *our* world impress me more than these.

Since the poems of Eugenio Montale[4] (Nobel Laureate, 1975) are translated by an Indian, the remarkable G. Singh (who teaches Italian literature at the University of Belfast!), I have been spared an otherwise lame transition. Singh, in my opinion, is incomparably the best translator of Montale. While there is no facing-page Italian in this volume, Singh's critical study of the poet (Yale, 1973) includes many bi-lingual examples, together with extracts from Montale's perceptively cosmopolitan essays, which ought to be made available wholly. I have only 'some' Italian but I can *hear* nuances if I can *see* them. Singh is effortless, transposing Montale's inflections, his diffident yet somehow final judgements (on children, landscapes, the poetry of others, death in a sanatorium, his own unimportance) into an English both colloquial and courtly. (Montale's alleged "linguistic innovation" is not apparent in English.) This is a poetry of the

[4] NEW POEMS, by *Eugenio Montale*. Trans. and introduced by G. Singh. New Directions. $7.95.

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mind; witty, even scabrous, allusive, richly educated—concealing or stopping short before the too-too-serious:

> Stop at this point
> says the shadow.
> I have accompanied you in war and peace
> and also in the interval.
> I have been for you both excitement and boredom,
> have inspired you with virtue you didn't
> possess, with vices you didn't have.
> If now I leave you alone
> you won't be hurt, you'll be lighter
> than leaves, mobile as the wind.
> I must raise the mask, I am your thought,
> I am your "un-necessary," your useless exterior.
> . . . .
> Neither your worst nor your best
> belong to you and as for what you will have
> you can do without a shadow.
> At this point look with your eyes
> and also without eyes.
>
> ("At This Point")

Montale should not be thought of as exclusively a poet but as a man of letters. If we felt last year that there were greater talents eligible for the Stockholm laureateship, it was all the same a pleasure (and a staggering surprise!) that the Literature award went to an intellectual aristocrat. At the ceremonies, shaking with Parkinson's disease, assailed by those unshakeable fiends, the press photographers, Montale maintained the same congenial indifference toward caterpillars and hornets which one meets in his poems; he is one of the few recipients who has felt no need to pay for his prize by flattering the dubious social ethos of the Swedes, and he said *No* with a smile when invited to pronounce something fatuously confident about the future of culture. . . . He is not of course a major poet; he wants passion and scope; he tends to dismiss a subject before developing it. For the ironic shrug that brings down mountains of delusion, we settle gratefully.

The disordered language of Andrea Zanzotto,[5] Montale's contemporary (language described by Montale as "a drug," by the estranged Pasolini as "an unprecedented condition of estrangement"), has provoked from Professor Gino Rizzo, in a long afterword to these poems, a modernist-cum-classical rhetoric to defend it: "maximum of referentiality," "axiological value," "autological treatment," "polysemous density" and "metonymic analogies!"—no help at all, I'm afraid, to poetry which is sufficiently

[5] SELECTED POETRY OF ANDREA ZANZOTTO, edited and trans. by *Ruth Feldman* and *Brian Swann*. Lockert Library/ Princeton University Press. $16.50; $3.95 paperback.

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difficult but often less indigestible than these fearsome hyperboles and figures pedantical would lead you to infer. Neither space nor authority sanctions me to "place" Zanzotto for you in the stream (or explosion) of Italian modernism. A brace of quotations from the verse, bridging twenty postwar years, will suggest the exhaustive renovation Zanzotto undertook as he moved from depicting, in an unruffled calm of mind and eye, the landscape of the Euganean hills, to an increasingly polytonal and overpopulated form of communication, reminiscent of Ezra Pound (to say nothing of E. E. Cummings) in his attempt to synthesize derisively the entire playground of urban culture. Between circa 1948 and the mid-Sixties, Zanzotto abandoned the lyrical for the rhetorical, replaced sobriety with the levities of aggression.

. . . .
Mornings, if it's true,
the snow of three transparent
mountains awakens me;
mornings there's the kitchen-garden
that fits into a hand
and yields only shells,
there's the ants' cellar
there's the red chicory, prized resource
prodigal under my fingers,
under a wind that doesn't dare disturb us

The apple I enjoy
tastes of hoar-frost,
in the granary a friendly ray lies down
and the old newspaper of pure dust;
and all the silence of moss
which we lose in the valleys
slows the same walk
the same muffling of the sun
that catches itself looking at us
that catches us at all the doors
("Because We Are")

. . . .
The gods' absence, it is written, embroidered, will help us
—will not help us—
after all the absence is not absence the gods not gods
help is not help. And the unknowing silence
ready for everything,
this going beyond this outrage, always, the same
(hardly attributable) (refractory to references)
even more so the reluctance, in its readiness:
and the space-silence, provocative, there it is in diffraction,

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it becomes greedy froths with stories, gossip, vignettes
with which one fills that ill-born splendor, never born,
daubed trouvailles, nice-nasty words in slices and mouthfuls
puppets,
cold jokes whistles in the ears. . . .
("The Elegy in Petél")

We may wonder, as we've wondered before at poets determined on annihilation, where Zanzotto can go (beyond his *latest* poems, I mean, which, ever more vehemently, are surrendered to incoherence). I would care less if his language were not otherwise so inexhaustibly charged with melodic energy and experimental wit (the facing Italian is indispensable). His translators maintain that Zanzotto's "is the old new voice of genuine originality for, as Montale said, 'his metronome is perhaps the heart-beat.' " Perhaps. One thing is above dispute: Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann have vindicated their ideal. "One admires a poet and somewhere along the line one wants to possess that poet." They have done so; hence, made their possession ours. A work with which I'm not familiar, the poems of a Sicilian, Lucio Piccolo, they have also translated. For these and other projects (q.v. Benny Andersen) the Lockert Library of Poetry Translation is responsible, which goes far to authorize it as one of the most beneficial intellectual enterprises in contemporary America.

William Arrowsmith tells me something unbelievable in his introduction to Cesare Pavese's *Lavorare Stanca*,[6] now first translated into English: that "forty years after its first appearance the book is still ignored for much the same extra-literary reasons—as a treasonable disloyalty to Italian tradition." If this be credible, how on earth do Italian critics (since Arrowsmith can't mean the bellowing *vox populi*) receive Zanzotto? No matter. No matter. Any *non*-Italian reader of poetry would instantly characterize *Hard Labor* as the fruit of a Mediterranean esthetics: the solid transparency, so to speak, of images in which the finite coexists with the imponderable; tangible figures in a Piedmont landscape who appear to converse in limbo, gregarious but individually profiled. To the poems of Yannis Ritsos these bear more than a passing resemblance; the same steady scrutiny of the mundane until it acquires an ambience of the unnatural. Publisher's copy has it that "*Hard Labor* is alive with the moments, the passion and the anguish, of ordinary people as they work, love, live out their lives": accurate enough for a frontal reading; the *real* subject is of course Pavese himself as an adolescent country boy; Pavese *re-inventing* himself in after years, rehearsing a communion with others (peasants, whores, poachers) of which in actuality he was forever incapable. The real subject is announced over and over throughout the poems—*The man alone*. "The man alone sees the boy again. Faint-hearted boy, all eyes . . . ." "The man alone gets up while the sea's still dark/ and the stars

[6] HARD LABOR, by *Cesare Pavese*. Trans. and introduced by William Arrowsmith. Grossman/Viking. $8.95.

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still flicker . . . ." "The man alone—the ex-prisoner—goes back to prison/ every time he bites into a piece of bread . . . ." "A man alone facing the useless sea,/ waiting for evening to come, waiting for morning . . . ."

Of his own creative strategy, Pavese explained in a moment of third-person candor,

> Even while seeming to take part in the human drama, he is inwardly aiming at something else; he is already moving in a different world, which appears in his action as symbolic intent. This trait, which looks like duplicity [*dopiezza*] is in fact a necessary reflex of his power to be—in the presence of a piece of paper—a poet. (Quoted by William Arrowsmith, "Introduction")

(I fancy that he speaks for all poets worth the name!) The "necessary reflex" created these poems; it killed Pavese. His solitude, as Arrowsmith recognizes, was "incurable and circular." Ten years later, aged 42, the poet committed suicide, a fate he had often envisioned, once with unguarded prescience in the most translucent of all his *andante* episodes, "Paradise on the Roofs" (1940).

. . . .
You wake one morning, once and for all,
in the warmth of the final sleep: the shadow will be
like the warmth. Through the big window
a vaster sky will fill the room.
Up the staircase one day forever
no more voices will come, no dead faces.

There'll be no need to get out of bed.
Only the dawn, spreading at the window,
will enter the empty room, dressing it all
in a quiet clarity, almost a light,
setting a thin shadow on the face looking up.
Memories will be lumps of shadow
flattened out like burnt embers sifting down
in the grate. Memory will be the blaze
that yesterday still smoldered in the spent eyes.

A pity: the Italian was not provided; even in William Arrowsmith's faithful (I assume) translation we can only half divine the purifying rigor to which Pavese, by his own report, submitted every conception before it took final shape as poem on the page.

The late Austin Clarke,[7] asked by Robert Frost (ages ago) what kind of poetry he wrote, answered, "I load myself with chains and try to get out of

[7] SELECTED POEMS, by *Austin Clarke*. Edited by Thomas Kinsella. Wake Forest University Press. $12.50; $6.95 paperback.

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them." Such a figure would be appropriate for the method of Pavese. Clarke, at first reading, sounds exuberant and unconfined. I wish I enjoyed him wholly, but the exuberance was purchased under compulsion. Inexhaustibly tuned to the ear (not everyone's!), his poetry, as Thomas Kinsella, his present editor, is ready to confirm, "demands patience and discrimination to an unusual degree." Kinsella insists that any "view of modern poetry which does not take [Clarke's] seriously into account is not adequate." At the same time, he acknowledges the drawbacks. Clarke's "infatuation with Gaelic prosody" increased the habitual discords of the poet's compacted language. "The elements of grammar and syntax transfer and contort." Much of this contortion is owing to Clarke's effort to retain syllabic count and let stress fall where it will: to my ear not an altogether damaging strategy. More serious is the other charge levelled by Kinsella. "His poems, with few exceptions, are content to be parochial. . . . They reflect only the immediate milieu." (Clarke's Ireland is not the universal setting, like Pavese's Piedmont.) Even this limitation is not insurmountable; "immediate milieu" is what the poetry is all about and a lot goes on in it. What *I* find tedious is Clarke's perennial smut and his arduous pedantry, the tombstone-crawling to jot down endless names of local Irish patriots. Gallantry—and Kinsella's discriminating apologia—compels me to cite grand exceptions. With greater delight than impatience, I find myself rereading "The Flock at Dawn," "Forget-Me-Not," "Paupers;" a few other short poems. The following is a peppery tail-end passage from "Forget-Me-Not."

> Too much historied
> Land, wrong in policies, armings, hope in prelates
> At courts abroad! Rags were your retribution,
> Hedge schools, a visionary knowledge in verse
> That hid itself. The rain-drip cabin'd the dream
> of foreign aid . . . Democracy at last.
> White horses running through the European mind
> Of the First Consul. Our heads were cropped like his.
> New brow; old imagery. A Gaelic poet,
> Pitch-capped in the Rebellion of '98,
> Called this Republic in an allegory
> The Slight Red Steed.

That is a speaking voice: declamatory, as the subject warrants, fitful in its forced economy; a contrived stammer that swiftly engrosses a chronicle of ruin.

You may have to be Irish to go all the way with Austin Clarke. You need not be to accept John Montague[8] or Ciarán Carson. Natives may retort that Montague is doubtful kin, since he was born in Brooklyn and has lived long in France. To quell argument (or fan another) I'll think of him

[8] A SLOW DANCE, by *John Montague*. Wake Forest University Press. $4.25 paperback.

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as Anglo-Irish and note that his verse is less admired than it deserves. (He seems to have alienated critics with some evidently gauche Communist stuff he wrote a few years ago. I haven't seen it.) Like his earlier poems, those of *A Slow Dance* are saturated with a cordial humanity and focused, very often, on aging, lonely clay, disdained by their fellows but pardoned by Montague, with a vividness that brings them close up, impossible to snub, like the ex-Brass of "Colonel Retreating"—prowling "Mouse-quiet in the night . . . cloudhuge in his nightgown. . . .

> halting
> only when, gnawed by the worm
> of consciousness, disappointment
> at disappointment, he stood
> on the porch to inhale
> the hay and thistle-scented
> air of a Normandy harvest;
> piss copiously in salutation
> towards a shining moon.

or the Dowager, dwelling "in this leaky Western castle".

> In the old days I read or embroidered,
> But now it is enough to see the sky change
> . . . .
> Wet afternoons I ride in the Rolls;
> Windshield wipers flail helpless against the rain:
> I thrash through pools like smashing panes of glass.
>
> And the light afterwards! Hedges steam,
> I ride through a damp tunnel of sweetness,
> The bonnet strewn with bridal hawthorn
>
> From which a silver lady leaps, always young,
> Alone, I hum with satisfaction in the sun,
> An old bitch, with a warm mouthful of game.

Ciarán Carson[9] is a newcomer (age, 28) whose first collection is *not* hampered by the Gaelic language in which the author was educated. From every poem a voice of resonant clarity speaks with precocious wisdom—and the *fey* touch of his race. Carson's virtual subject is *artifice,* the aspects of beauty, in the last analysis unaccountable, which are visibly present in a host of established or unexpected places and objects: pottery figures in a provincial parlor, "Miming with their crimped hands/ the minute elaborations of the afternoon,/ the crinkling of the tablelinen"; ancestral weapons of "The Insular Celts":

[9] THE NEW ESTATE, by *Ciarán Carson*. Wake Forest University Press. $3.25 paperback.

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We cannot yet say why or how
They could not take things as they were.
Some day we will learn of how

Their bronze swords took the shape of leaves,
How their gold spears are found in cornfields,
Their arrows are found in trees.

Decay, itself, is no enemy of the "perennial art, this striving for form," when Carson broods on a dying women whose honey, snuff, whiskey and Lourdes water will linger after her decease:

Even the pearl
Forgets the suffering that made it
And acquires an unintended beauty.
("To Margaret")

Old prints, postage stamps or fading photographs are Carson's Grecian urn; ghosted by time, the stilted image teases fancy. "At The Windy Gap, 1910" is his most ceremonious effort in this vein; facing the camera, a charabanc party: "china cups shine dully in the twilight," seated ladies are correct in frills and lace; one man only, bowler-hatted, has his back toward us, all but hidden in the crowd:

. . . .
No-one casts a shadow, least of all this one
who turns away from us, in shyness, or disinterest,
or in contemplation. Does he watch the weather,
or perhaps, if someone came to photograph hours
later, would he still be there, the charabancs gone back
to where they came from, to the safe hotels?
Perhaps he came to look at poverty, the barren stone,
the rain-clouds thickening, in a sepia wash
above the darkened mountains, through the mountain-gap
one patch of sunlight, and no-one to be seen for miles.

Rock with Water[10] is the perfect title for Ronald Gaskell's poems. Alternatively, they move with the elements—sky, sea, creatures of the sea—and stand rock-firm to embody a monument or a work of plastic art. Published by a small English press (with a minimum of promotion that borders on reluctance) Gaskell's first collection illustrates on every page the poet's estimation of intelligence: ". . . not a procedure of the mind [but] rather an intimacy of eye and muscle/ with the earth." Gaskell's intimacy of eye and muscle (coordinated, never doubt, by procedures of the mind) confers on these poems a prevailing symmetry, wit when occasion demands, and

[10] ROCK WITH WATER, by *Ronald Gaskell*. Abson Books. £1.80. No American price.

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reserves of power which, in more than one instance, proclaim a visionary gift of definition. Spare calligraphies (seascape, March winds, an olive tree) imply a total weather, inscribe the character of a place with such severity that nothing further, you feel, need be said on the subject. "Palazzo Vecchio":

. . . .
This is not
An aesthetic phenomenon. Its strength is the authority
Of history; precisely,
Seven centuries of event hardened into fact.

Let its rectitude be a warning:
This is no palace but a plain fortress.
It rejects words as it rejects the trivial cafés.

As a naturalist, Gaskell is level, in his own ways, with the best among British poets of that bent—Walker, Hughes, Silkin—bemused, sardonic, clinical, benign and—how shall I say—*alarmed*? as in "Crows":

. . . .
Obscene;
Not in imagination
Where we hear the ragged filth of their wings still
Trailing through the space of the tormented mind,
But in themselves:

In the black and stalking claws, in the hunched shoulders,
In the little eyes
Shuttered from everything
But the worm or seed or beetle that the bill can suddenly
Locate, possess, destroy.

Gaskell's masterpiece—a major contemporary poem—is "Van Gogh": its burden, "the struggle to keep everything in place. . . . the fight to hold the chair at bay/ While bed and floorboards reared at each other/ In their agony. . . ."

Perhaps it helped to have people there.
If the bigboned face of a woman in a café
Could be stilled, even for a moment, in the modelling
Of cheek, throat and shoulder, life
Could be contained at least, no longer spouting
Cypresses or whirling an intense sun.

But in the end fields that he had maddened with the fury
Of his eye broke loose. Wheat's brightness

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Sang like a swarm of bees in his shorn ear;
Crows spawned in an ocean that had smeared
The sky out, and the contorted earth
Howled its triumph through the plowed furrows of his mind.

On sleepless nights, eye and muscle beat out that Miltonic finale, anxious not to misplace a syllable: *"and the contorted earth/ Howled its triumph through the plowed furrows of his mind."*

Neither bird nor beast nor gilded monument has a look-in with William Bronk,[11] intrepidly disengaging from his verse all the furniture of person, place and thing. Several poems of *Light and Dark,* first published 1956 (the 1975 edition is unrevised) were modelled in ten-line units, four or five to a poem; they referred directly to the world of rain and winter shrubs and red barns and musical performances; leisurely, expansive, somewhat Tennysonian, they bore titles like "The Mind's Landscape on an Early Winter's Day." *Silence and Metaphor* is stripped of any scenic or topical accessory that might ensure the poems' popularity. Each of the forty-eight conforms to an 8-line, 2-stanza construction, the majority quite devoid of nominal beings and events. What, you may ask, remains? An irreducible presence—the poems are not arid or meager—that of the poet's voice, plying his art of the confounding question. "These incantations," as Bronk once wrote of chamber music, "conjure the form of the world": incantations, then, or epigrams, in the Classical sense—interrogations which no late Greco-Roman would have been likely to put: questions asked of the void, addressed to the poet by the poet; to us, if we listen; and answers, in turn restated as questions.

Whomever we might miss, it is not our friends
though there is no one else. Then, isn't there anyone?
Missing is how we feel: please, let them last
whoever they be that we think it be they.

Otherwise, we have to know there is none
including us (or excluding, more properly,
leaving us out as we are, as our friends are):
missing is about that, that no one is.

("Missing")

Bronk will probably suffer the same oblivion as that other paragon of poetic enclosure, Elisabeth Ross Taylor. If these two drab volumes were combined as Selected Poems, given a handsome format and a VIP on the cover, solemnly vouching for the poet's relevance, Mr. Bronk might stand a chance of being read and admired (at least, counter-questioned!). He deserves that chance.

[11] LIGHT AND DARK (1975 edition) and SILENCE AND METAPHOR, by *William Bronk*. The Elizabeth Press. np.

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An informing catch-phrase in John Woods's latest collection[12] is *lie down*: position of defeat, preface to copulation and death. Woods is determined to sing the unforgettably unbearable, at the risk of remaining in a Dust Bowl of the mind. Half his new poems seem to mourn an America, and a self, that never came out of the Depression, never freed itself from Main Street: in such poems he is contemporary with Sinclair Lewis and Eugene O'Neill, employing a facile bitterness toward hick politicians, smug relatives, the despotisms of the locker-room, and displaying an adolescent's newfound revulsion from toilets, sex, money-making and the rural Protestant ethos. "Communion once a year, but cold/ chicken and potato salad every/ Bible meeting . . . The line waiting for grades can peel off/ The line wanting advice can shuffle itself. Those wanting sugar-tits can suck,/ and pre-post neurotic women/ can carry off their couches on their backs." Far from the textured rediscovery with which Richard Hugo endows acres of home-town distress, this species of sarcasm reaches its nadir in "For Prevention of Disease Only," as vulgar as the sub-cultural myth it is designed to immolate. If at his best Woods were not so buoyant, so deft at placing logically the illogical image, he would be unreadably depressing; any reader will have the precarious option of deciding, as he lies down to take thought, whether or not the well-wrought shape of an individual poem mitigates the terminal negatives, the declension of the heart, the sourness of the taste. Oddly enough, when Woods extends his disgruntled gaze beyond his mid-West purgatory to embrace, entire, the evolutionary error, he achieves a durable poem, "Lying Down with Men and Women." (The concluding half only is quoted.)

. . . .
Part of every day, the water mood and the tree mood
rise in our bodies, and we must
lie down a bit to honor our lost
tails and gills.
When we lie on our backs,
we see so far away we try to give names to light,
like wild dogs we have taught
to lick our hands.
And when we lie on our faces,
we see too close, the blank wall
at the end of the corridor
And so
we lie down with men and women
because we are terrified, and sometimes,
for that reason, we stand up and kill.

Louis Simpson[13] is closer to, let us say, Montale than he is to John Woods; too urbane to surrender himself for long to a poetry of deep

[12] STRIKING THE EARTH, by *John Woods*. Indiana University Press. $6.95.
[13] SEARCHING FOR THE OX, by *Louis Simpson*. William Morrow, $5.95.

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misgiving. All the same, his verse might be enhanced, had it something of Woods' tensile phrasing. Simpson tends to rest on his oars; his going lacks muscle and a sometimes specious unity is achieved by his returning at the end of a leisurely poem to the initial reference; meanwhile he has wandered, in a not unwelcome trance of chatty free association, worldly browsing. The pleasures of shape, rhythm and duration are replaced in Simpson's poems by the pleasures of *à propos de rien*, the sigh of relief, the abrupt switch from wine to water and the kind of genial name-flashing to which New Yorkers, notably, are partial (Tolstoi and De Kooning, Conrad and Truman Capote, Hannibal, Keats, Cavafy, the Torah, Saks Fifth Avenue and an alcoholic novelist who knew D. H. Lawrence). To judge from the copious hand-clapping on the cover, Simpson is a favorite of many who don't really like poetry unless it sounds like prose in a cocktail bar. Simpson's does but he's better than my impoliteness may suggest: endearing, after all, precisely because he *doesn't* brace himself too audibly, doesn't kid or preen himself; he knows what he can do and which attitudes he should not strike. In lines like these, from the long poem, *Lorenzo,* the limits of his gravity are judiciously, if loosely, contained.

. . . .
Sitting among these stones
I listened to the dry leaves rustling
and thought of a poet's life.
Genus irritabile vatum
Because he longs for Beauty
with man he grows inraged.
Driven here and there . . . If he does find
a home,
the world comes along and smashes it.
Just as frequently, he smashes it himself.

Most people can hardly understand it,
content as they are to stay in one place.
Like the cicada, to make one sound repeatedly
all their lives. Monotonous. Like the rasp
of the spring of a watch being wound.

While I do believe it's too late in the century (or not yet?) to become a Crow Indian, for me the far Western wilderness is, and will always be, the *essential* America. Poetry is anywhere—I concede—yet some places lodge deeper in the heart and in the recollecting eye than others, and call up a readier response. I have a special haunted receptivity to that domain, the altitudes of Nowhere, which David Wagoner,[14] better than any poet, knows (not *better*, perhaps, than Richard Hugo or R. G. Vliet, but to more comprehensive ends in his twenty years of poetry).

[14] COLLECTED POEMS, 1956–1976, by *David Wagoner*. Indiana University Press. $12.50.

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. . . .
Set free by our sleep and coming down to the water,
The bears, the deer, the martens dark as their fur,
As soundless as the night herons,
All drink and turn away, making no light.
The tail of the wind is stirring the soft ashes,

And nothing of ours will be left in the morning
Though we guard it now through dewfall and ground
mist.
But here at the heart of night
A salmon leaps: the smack of his wild body
Breaks through the valley, splashing our sleep with fire.
("Fire by the River")

So beautiful, that hush of a lost world; the poet gathers up and consecrates almost everything a thousand American writers have attempted. Scent-knowledge, leaf-knowledge, root-knowledge: ". . . the minute language/ of moss and lichen,/ the duff of sword fern and sorrel, of spike moss and beadruby . . . the signals of bent grass, the speech of sand,/ The gestures of dust. . . ." Wagoner has blazed a trail to himself; as a poet, fought for mastery of metrical line, dissolving cadence, the perfect imbalance, the decisive last word; has honored the masters, stacked his kindling, explored the squatters' colony. (Various poems among these two hundred exhibit a startling familiarity with the backwash of many a lost tribe: convicts, shoplifters, burglars, tinhorn patriots, "resurrected nobodies," an "escape artist"—and Ernest Hemingway.) Now, having surmounted the disciplines, Wagoner is a tall man with a stride or lope of his own; the lesson of his best hours (like the Chinese, he gives advice) is this:

A man on foot can suffer only one guiding principle
Next to his shadow: One Damn Thing After Another. . . .

A group of nine in the "New Poems" (1976) brings to conclusive fruition his Long Walk in this style. For obvious reasons I think of them as his *participial* poems; the titles clue you in—"Breaking Camp", "Meeting a Bear," "Tracking," "Missing the Trail" et.seq. They are present and ongoing movement; they map a hazardous journey (not without a smile, not without terror) into unknown or imperfectly charted territory, "northwest by nothing." Taken together with others in kind from earlier years,[15] they recount an odyssey, a pilgrim's progress, an Orpheus in the Cascades—Trial by Hike. All but one of the latest nine are addressed to a second-person-generic.

[15] "Staying Alive"; "Crossing Half a River"; "The Middle of Nowhere"; "The Other Side of the Mountain"; "Slow Country"; "Sleeping in the Woods." To compare the forest microcosm of Wagoner with the underwater of Laurence Lieberman may not be an idle exercise.

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Though you can see in the distance, outlined precisely
With speechless clarity, the place you must go,
The problem remains
Judging how far away you are and getting there safely.
Distant objects often seem close at hand
When looked at grimly,
But between you and those broken hills (so sharply in focus
You have to believe in them with all your senses)
Lies a host of mirages:
Water put out like fire, the shimmer of flying islands,
The unbalancing act of mountains upside down.
Passing through too much air,
Light shifts, fidgets, and veers in ways clearly beyond you,
Confusing its weights and measures with your own
Which are far simpler:
A man on foot can suffer only one guiding principle
Next to his shadow: One Damn Thing After Another,
Meaning his substance
In the shape of his footsoles against the unyielding ground.
("From Here To There")

The cycle is closed with the first-person-plural of "Travelling Light" (too intricate for partial quotation). *Light,* in context, signifies not only weightlessness but also illumination and the "brittle whiteness" of winter, the final "cold speech of the earth." In all American literature there is not, I think, a sequence of poetry more remarkable, nor is there today any American poet I would name as more revealing than Wagoner of "the Land Behind the Wind."

Benny Andersen[16] has raised to a fine art the Danish national sport: self-subversion.

I was born with a howl
squalling I received my baptism
yelled when I was thrashed
shrieked when bees stung me
but gradually became more Danish
learned to smile at the world
at the photographer
    at doctors
        policemen and perverts
became a citizen in the land of the smile
. . . .
("Smile")

A happy highjacker (not *inordinately* happy), Andersen's hostage is him-

[16] SELECTED POEMS, by *Benny Andersen.* Trans. by Alexander Taylor. Lockert Library/Princeton University Press. $9.50; $2.95 paperback.

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self. And he recalls my Chinese gentleman, writing poems to release his sorrows. An immemorial way of releasing them is to convert them into comedy: self-explanatory; after centuries of comic tradition, however, it is disappointing to realize that among intellectuals of a certain stripe there is something negligible about verse not hallmarked with intimations of the indigo profound. The humorous poem leaves a critic with little or nothing to say, unless he's a solemn ass. What's funny is obviously so; if, to an individual reader, it isn't, no *explication de texte* will ever mend it. To insist that a given comedian is at heart *serious* is to be a bore. The best one can do for Benny Andersen is quote him:

> I have two friends
> who are enemies
> and two enemies
> who are friends
> One of my friends is friends with one of my enemies
> My other friend is an enemy of my other enemy's friend
> It is difficult to keep straight
> whom one should watch out not to say what to.
> . . . .
>
> ("Dear Friends")

He hangs in there; a companion piece, "Dear Enemies," is quite as hilarious—if you prefer, as disquieting. The next best thing I can do for Andersen is overstate (for readers unfamiliar with Danish) his fantastic manipulation of a language I have always thought preposterous, designed exclusively for Victor Borge, the other contemporary great Dane. (Yes, I know Kierkegaard wrote Danish; he doesn't count; a mere philosopher.) If you can read the Dansk on the facing pages with *some* sense of what it sounds like, your glee, and your respect, will be augmented. A generous share of the respect will go to Alexander Taylor whose translations earn the highest possible compliment; they read as if written in English. How better can I close this brief recommendation, and my chronicle, than with a poem that celebrates, however guardedly, the hours to come?

> Vibrant morning,
> separate the sour from the sweet,
> the inside from outside,
> let knives of light scrape away
> my core of sour pride
> so that I can fear
> when fear's hour strikes,
> so that I can hear
> where I shall join in
> when the great music starts.
>
> ("Morning Prayer")

The man is exhilarating!

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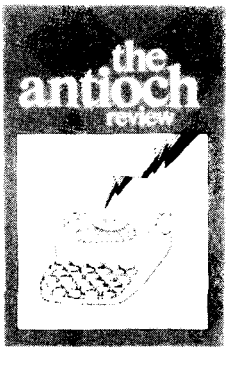

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